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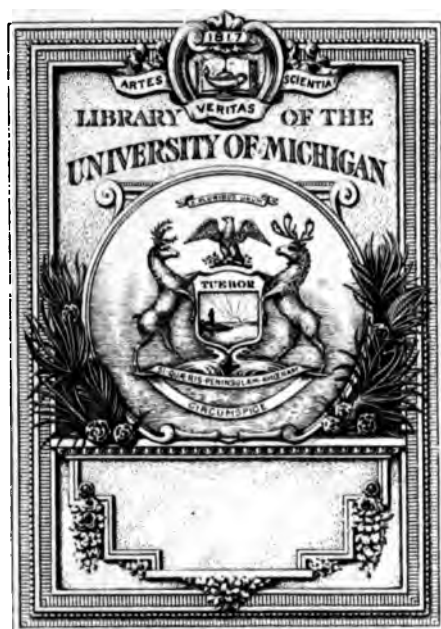
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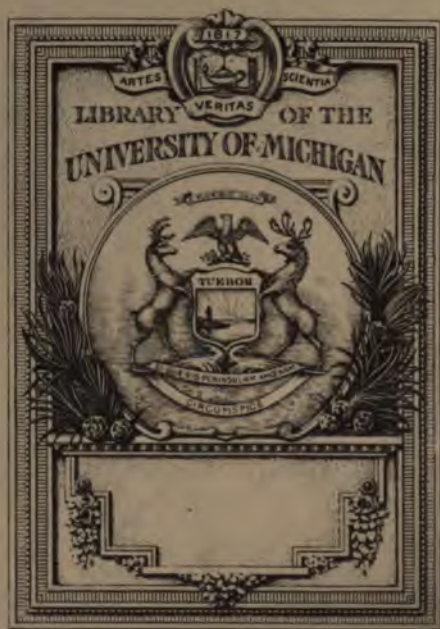
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EARL LAVENDER

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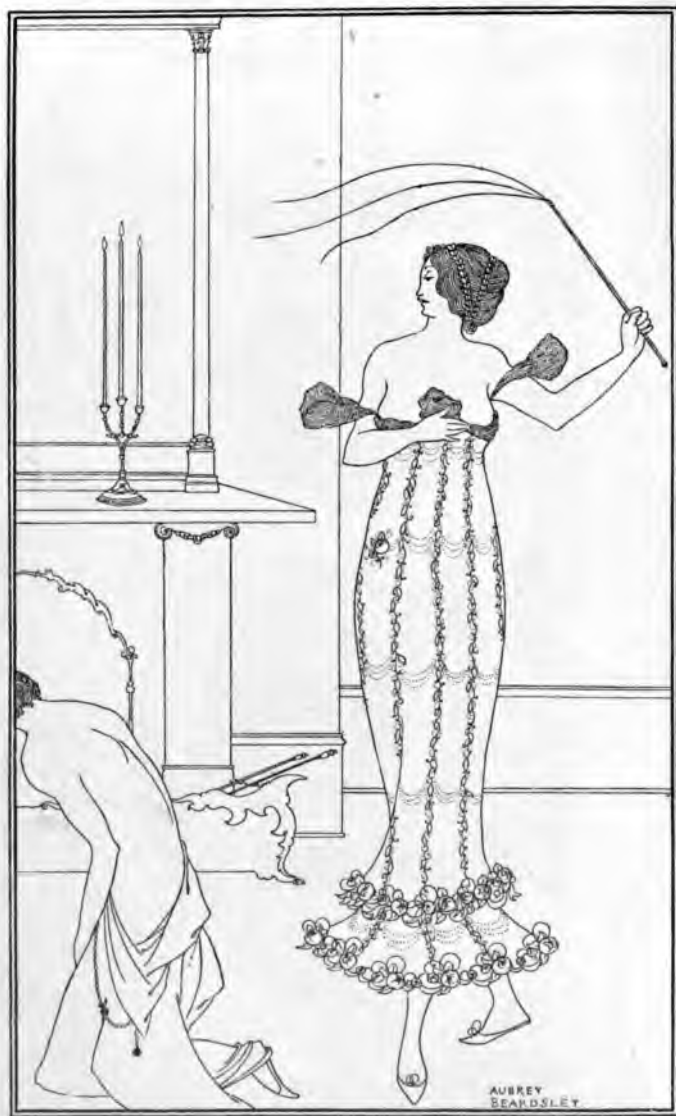
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A FULL AND TRUE
ACCOUNT OF THE
WONDERFUL
MISSION OF EARL
LAVENDER, WHICH
LASTED ONE NIGHT
AND ONE DAY :
WITH A HISTORY
OF THE PURSUIT OF
EARL LAVENDER
AND LORD
BRUMM BY MRS
SCAMLER AND
MAUD EMBLEM.

BY
JOHN DAVIDSON.

WITH A FRONTISPIECE

BY

AUBREY BEARDSLEY.

LONDON : 12 YORK
BUILDINGS, ADELPHI :
WARD & DOWNEY,
LIMITED.

1895

*Though our eyes turn ever waveward,
Where our sun is well-nigh set ;
Though our Century totters graveward,
We may laugh a little yet.*

*Oh ! our age-end style perplexes
All our elders' time has tamed ;
On our sleeves we wear our sexes,
Our diseases, unashamed.*

*Have we lost the mood romantic
That was once our right by birth ?
Lo ! the greenest girl is frantic
With the woe of all the earth !*

*But we know a British rumour,
And we think it whispers well :
' We would ventilate our humour
In the very jaws of Hell.'*

*Though our thoughts turn ever Doomwards,
Though our sun is well-nigh set,
Though our Century totters tombwards,
We may laugh a little yet.*

'I undertoke

. . . to make a boke

Which stant between earnest and game.'

GOWER. 'Confessio Amantis.' Bk. viii.

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NOTE

It has been maintained that the so-called *Décadence* is factitious, and exists only in the fancies of a few, who are misled mainly by the moribund condition of the nineteenth century, now well advanced in its last decade. It is true that definite periods do not usually end with chronological parallelism so pat to the necessities of competitive examinees. On the other hand, there may be in the recrudescence of Flagellation, as recorded in this 'full and true account,' an indication of a critical turn in the history of the world. Accomplished stages in the development of

peoples have again and again been accompanied by the formation of Societies for the practice of scourging. The first appearance of Flagellants, which took place in the beginning of the thirteenth century, was synchronous with the signature of Magna Charta ; and their reorganisation some fifty years later occurred at the same time as the overthrow of the Saracen Empire. In the middle of the fourteenth century, when the Flagellants overran Germany for the first time, Rienzi was Tribune of Rome. The revival of the sect in 1414 came with the martyrdom of John Huss and Jerome of Prague, and with the session of the Council of Constance, which deposed two Popes. In the sixteenth century Catherine de Medici, during the overthrow of Protestantism in France, organised whipping parties among the court dames, in which she herself co-operated.

Lastly, a procession of Flagellants marched through Lisbon in 1820, the year of the suppression of the Spanish Inquisition, and a year of revolution in both the old and the new worlds. The Flagellant Society to which the Lady of the Veil introduced Earl Lavender may therefore be taken as a sign of the times—a sign of an age of effete ideals. At least, the existence of such a sect among the wealthy classes is a proof of the existence of widespread contempt of the great commonplaces of life—love, marriage, and the rearing of children. In this some will not be slow to detect the results of long-continued leisure and luxury; and, indeed, when a class is exempt for generations from suffering and toil—the lot prepared for the race from the beginning—it is not to be wondered at, that men and women, forced by cir-

cumstances into an unnatural life of ease, should rebel against everything natural. What seems to deserve some commendation in these modern Flagellants, who are now introduced to the public for the first time in an episode in this veracious history, is the cheerful decorum of their whole procedure: they are not bigots—only unfortunate people with no vital interest in life, ignorant of what to do with their health and strength.

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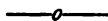
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EARL LAVENDER



CHAPTER I

HOW THEY DINED IN THE STRAND

‘I SHOULD like to know very much why you came here,’ said a middle-aged man to his younger companion in a restaurant in the Strand.

It was the evening of a June day, and the restaurant, although not crowded, was close and hot. The speaker and his companion sat side by side at a table opposite the door, in order to encounter whatever air might be going. They were at the back of the room, which was so long and narrow that the view of the Strand by the open door had the strangeness of a scene observed through an archway.

‘Why come here?’ repeated the middle-aged man. ‘A hot, stuffy, little hole.’

‘But clean,’ said the young man. ‘You will soon know the reason. Waiter, cold roast for two, and two pints of bitter.’

The middle-aged man grew pale, and uttered a half-articulate ‘What?’

‘Yes, it has come to this,’ said the other, laying two half-crowns on the table.

The middle-aged man stared at the coins; a helpless smile overspread his broad, good-humoured face; he bowed his head and muttered, ‘Cold roast!’

‘With cabinet-pudding to follow,’ added his companion.

‘Cabinet-pudding!’ exclaimed the middle-aged man, starting to his feet, and sitting down immediately in mingled protest, chagrin and resignation.

‘Two roast beefs, one and eightpence; two breads, twopence; two beers, eightpence; two puddings, eightpence; three and twopence in all,’ said the younger man calmly.

‘Leaving one and tenpence,’ groaned the

other. 'And I've got accustomed to benedictine and a partaga after dinner.'

'Benedictine, ninepence each ; leaves fourpence. We must have twopenny cigars.'

'Never!' cried the middle-aged man. 'We shall have ninepenny cigars and twos of whisky.'

'It's all the same to me,' said the other. 'Comrade,' continued the younger man, 'you seem put out. I like our impecuniosity.'

'You're young, and like anything new. It's change you want. I'm middle-aged, and there's nothing staler to me than change. Constant comfort and little luxuries as regular as the clock are fresher than change.'

The other made no reply, and they were soon discussing the cold roast with very good appetites. Through the open door they watched the cabs and 'buses and the crowd of walkers, like objects in a peep-show. They were in good physical condition ; the rapid passage of the ever-changing throng across their narrow field of vision was pleasing to their eyes, and the hum and tramp and muffled roar soothed

them like a lullaby. The falsely-blamed cabinet-pudding was cordially forgiven, and the last drop of beer had a vinous flavour.

‘Where shall we smoke?’ said the elder of the two, setting down his pewter pot with a faint sigh.

‘In a public-house,’ replied the other. ‘We can’t get twos of whisky anywhere else.’

The middle-aged man acquiesced in silence.

‘Ha!’ he whispered suddenly, clutching his companion’s arm; ‘you’ve given the waiter fourpence. We can’t have ninepenny cigars now.’

‘Neither we can. What’s to be done?’

‘I’m afraid we must have threes of whisky, and be content with sixpenny cigars.’

‘Then we can stay where we are.’

‘And now,’ said the middle-aged man, when their cigars were lit, ‘what do you propose to do?’

‘I propose that we dedicate ourselves to chance.’

‘Have you no friends in London?’

‘None. Have you?’

‘None. But how shall we dedicate ourselves to chance?’

‘We have practically done so by spending our last penny; but let us accept our fate with thorough goodwill, and look upon our destitution as the very highest compliment Providence could have paid us. It shall now appear of what stuff we are made.’

‘Yes,’ said the middle-aged man slowly.

‘I said Providence,’ continued the younger man, ‘but I really mean Evolution. Some years ago I thought of coming to London without a penny, and seeing what would happen, but the idea gradually dropped into the background. Now I find myself exactly in the predicament into which I once thought of volunteering.’

‘Ah!’ interrupted the middle-aged man, ‘I, too, have sometimes found myself in circumstances which I had imagined years before.’

‘Of course,’ said the other. ‘I therefore understand, since it has come about without my will, that it is lawful for me to make the experiment.’

‘To dedicate yourself to chance?’

‘That was my phrase; but you mustn’t misapprehend me. I am gradually leading up to a revelation which it is now time for me to make. Chance is only the operation of undetected laws, or the elasticity of laws already known. Do not suppose that in this dedication I am doing anything extravagant. I recognise the facts of the case, and shall proceed with a perfect reliance on Evolution.’

‘And you wish me to accompany you—relying on Evolution?’

‘I shall be very glad if you will.’

‘How old are you?’ asked the middle-aged man.

‘Twenty-five. And you?’

‘Forty. We got on beautifully while we had money. Are our ages suitable for roughing it together?’

‘Ah! Have you any strong convictions? Are you what is called religiously inclined?’

‘Not specially; but I can understand how people go over to the Church of Rome, for example.’

‘Then you will be able to understand me,’



said the young man. 'I am of a religious temperament, and Evolution is my religion. What others mean by Evolution I don't know; I have never read anything about it, although I have looked through a good many books in my time. But one day three years ago, as I was passing along the main street of our town to play in a county match, I heard one man say to another, very earnestly,—“Evolution is more than a theory; it is a religion.” The remark arrested me. I brooded over it all afternoon; I couldn't score for thinking of it. I knew, of course, and attached a kind of meaning to such phrases as “the missing link” and “the survival of the fittest,” and I succeeded in thinking out for myself a sort of dogma of Evolution.'

'You may be said to have “got Evolution” in this sudden way, just as people talk about “getting religion.”'

'Precisely. I was converted. Sometimes I can dogmatise about Evolution, and sometimes I can't; but since my conversion I have lived an evolutionary life—consciously,

that is. We cannot help being Evolutionists, just as we cannot help being human ; but we may rebel against and sneer at Evolution in the same way as degraded or powerful intellects mock at humanity ; or, through ignorance, we may thwart the intention of Evolution with regard to ourselves. Now, for three years, I have subordinated my will to the evolutionary will, with the result that I have been perfectly happy. Happy, indeed, seems to me too weak a word to describe the serenity of my mind, and the delight which I feel in every member of my body. I am thoroughly convinced that I am quite fit, and that I shall survive—why, there is no saying how long I may survive, if, as I shrewdly suspect, I am *the* fittest.'

'*The* fittest?'

'Yes ; not among the fittest only, but *the* very fittest human male at present breathing.'

A smile betrayed the middle-aged man's amusement ; but as his companion was speaking ingenuously, he quickly resumed his gravity.

'What makes you think that you are *the* fittest?' asked the middle-aged man.

'It is not quite easy to tell; but the feeling of superiority to other people which is constant with me, and of equality with everything—with the universe, in fact—leads me to cherish this high opinion of myself. The equal of the universe: I am, as it were, one side of an equation, of which the universe is the other.'

'I see.'

'Yes. Now I have two immediate objects in view. The first is to devote myself to the evolutionary life more thoroughly than I have yet done—to think, speak, do nothing but what is evolutionary. Hitherto I have been little more than a passive Evolutionist. Henceforth I shall be the active agent, the apostle of Evolution. I shall give Evolution ample opportunity to vindicate my fitness, and that as publicly as possible in order to convert others.'

'How will you give Evolution ample opportunity to vindicate your fitness?' asked the middle-aged man.

‘You shall see that to-night. My second object is to find the fittest woman, and mate with her. This is a more complicated matter than you may think. It may seem to you a very simple thing to give the world proof of my supreme fitness, and then advertise in *The Times* for the fittest woman. It is really a simple plan, and might be very successful. We could make a lottery of it, each applicant paying five pounds, and the whole sum subscribed becoming the dowery of the chosen one. If five hundred thousand women applied, which is not an over-estimate I think, that would give a portion of two and a half millions—not too much for the fittest woman, especially as it would all be spent in the promulgation of Evolution. But, as I said, there is a difficulty—of which I may tell you hereafter.’

‘Have you nothing left to pawn?’ asked the middle-aged man very ruefully, having paid little attention to his companion’s last speech.

‘Nothing.’

‘Well, I think you might have been more careful with the money.’

‘My friend, you are too irritable. Let us review the situation. A week ago—is it a week ago?’

‘Yes; a day more in fact.’

‘Eight days ago you and I met each other in the smoking-room of the Great British Railway Hotel. There was nobody in the room but ourselves, and we got into conversation. Without telling each other plainly—we tried rather to hide it from each other, and so betrayed the fact that we had both, to put it shortly, run away; you at forty, I at twenty-five. It was plain also that we had both run away precipitately, for we had practically no luggage. Neither of us, of course, had travelled by the Great British Railway. You had arrived at Waterloo, I at Liverpool Street, and each had selected the Great British Hotel for a hiding place as being both out of the way, and near at hand. That evening we went out together, and you had your pocket picked. You asked me for the loan of a few pounds, which I promptly refused, for I had already made up my mind to become destitute as

soon as possible, and had also thought of you as a companion in the experiment. Indeed, if you consider it, I had no choice in the matter. Evolution, by driving you away from your friends with but a scanty supply of money, and bringing you to the Great British Hotel, threw you at my head as it were. I had forty pounds. We have smoked and drunk and eaten them with much pleasure and profit in eight days; also our watches, chains, rings and studs, and now, with our bodies in capital tune, and our minds quite free—mine, at least, almost quite free from care, we may, confident in the power of Evolution to protect the fit, go forth into the streets to-night, homeless and penniless.'

'Why not start in the morning instead? Let us have one more comfortable sleep in the hotel, one more good breakfast, and then, hey for broken victuals and a bed in Leicester Square.'

'Spoken like a man! But, my friend, you misunderstand the matter entirely. We are not going to live on broken victuals,

and sleep under bridges. But first of all make up your mind that we cannot return to the hotel. Our deposit there is exhausted, and they wouldn't take us in without another payment in advance, for you recollect we have no luggage. Besides, they begin to suspect us. We both came to the hotel on the same day, and both gave the name of "J. Smith." Strangers to each other at first, we suddenly struck up a great intimacy. You see, they are bound to be suspicious, and perhaps would not readmit us even with a fresh deposit. We can't go back to the hotel.'

'We can at least return for the under-clothing and night-shirts we bought.'

'And what should we do with them?'

'Take them with us of course.'

'Under our arms? Do you think Evolution would help men who went about with brown paper parcels?'

'We could leave them in the left luggage office.'

'You forget; we haven't twopence to pay for the ticket.'

The middle-aged man groaned.

‘There’s nothing but beggary and bridges for it then,’ he said.

‘Again you mistake. If I am, as I have every right to suspect, the fittest human being at present breathing, nothing will be allowed to betide me likely to interfere with my superb condition ; and you, as the companion provided for me, will share in my good fortune. Plenty of the best food and drink, comfortable beds, clothes, and changes of linen when we need them will be provided for us, or there is no truth in Evolution.’

‘But can’t you get some money? Can’t you write your friends for money?’

‘Can’t you?’

‘No ; not yet, at least,’ replied the elder of the two. ‘My whole life has been dislocated, and I can’t make up my mind to anything.’

‘I sympathise with you from my heart,’ said his companion. ‘I have noticed that you often fall silent, while a sombre look steals into your face. You suffer much ; I

can see it; and I admire the pluck with which you sustain your grief.'

'At my age,' replied the other pathetically, 'eating and drinking are of great consequence. Although I have always lived well enough, I have never had such exquisite fare and such variety as during the past week; it was that that kept me from brooding. But now that we are destitute I am afraid I shall give way.'

'Banish the fear. Sadness and repining are most unevolutionary. If you are fit, you will be cheerful, no matter what happens. Come, my friend, put a better face on it. Let us go out into the Strand.'

'I'll be as cheerful as I can.'

'Well resolved. You shall be my first disciple. We go forth to-night to conquer the world for Evolution.'

The destitute pair walked in the direction of Charing Cross—the younger, in undisturbed serenity; the elder, resigned and somewhat awestruck by the absolute mood of his companion. As they passed along the street nothing could be detected in their

appearance differing from that of other well-dressed men. Tall, dark, with well-marked, regular features, and a small moustache—one looked like a young man about town ; while the other, who was plump, clean-shaven, and with a ruddy complexion, might have passed for a well-to-do merchant. The contrast between their commonplace look and their extraordinary mission struck the younger man, and he remarked on it to his companion.

‘Yes,’ was the reply ; ‘we certainly don’t look like apostles, and I’m very sure I don’t feel like one.’

‘The feeling will come ; it requires to be evolved,’ rejoined the other. ‘And now, since we are fairly started, it becomes us to have names. I suppose that neither of us is really called “J. Smith,” and as we have apparently reason to conceal our true names we must choose others. What do you say? Can you suggest names?’

‘Since it is a mission we are on,’ replied the middle-aged man, ‘should we not call ourselves saint something or other. All the great missionaries were saints.’

‘There is a deal in what you say,’ rejoined the younger man. ‘But you must remember the saints you refer to were not canonised in their lifetime ; besides Evolution can hardly be expected to borrow a title from Roman Catholicism. You are, however, on the right tack ; our names must be symbolic of our mission. It seems to me that we must in some way indicate that we are the men of the future, yet taking along with us all that is sane from the past. How would it do were I to call myself Lord of the Future?’

‘It wouldn’t do,’ said his companion.

‘I daresay not ; it is indeed too naked a revelation. We must get a velvet glove for the hand of iron. I have it ! I shall call myself Earl de l’Avenir.’

‘Earl de Lavender ?’ queried the middle-aged man. ‘What has that to do with it?’

‘De Lavender !’ cried the other. ‘Your mistake is the fiat of Evolution ; I accept the name. Have we not ‘Birdcage Walk’ from *bocage*, and ‘sparrowgrass’ from asparagus ? Why not then Lavender from *l’avenir* ? Thanks, friend ; the more I consider it the

more symbolic it appears. As *l'avenir* is wrapped up and concealed in my new name of Lavender, so the future is wrapped up in me. Then the English meaning of the word! The sweet herb housewives use in linen-presses. I shall be the sweetener of the age. See you; I have not mistaken my mission; everything points out my destiny. Earl Lavender! I am to be called Earl Lavender.'

'Why Earl?'

'Because it is the finest of titles, and signifies that we shall carry with us into the future all that was highest and noblest in the past. And now for your name. Have you thought of one?'

'Must I call myself after a plant too?'

'It is not by any means necessary; but why do you ask?'

'Because I should like to be called Plantagenet.'

'Plantagenet? But it is antique, and has no prophecy in it that I can see.'

'Can't you work a prophecy out of it?'

'Wisely said; we must evolve a prophetic meaning; to that end it was suggested to

you. And I have it at once. Plantagenet—*planta genista*—I remember from the school history, is the plant broom. You are, therefore, to be called Broom, and to indicate the part you are to play in our mission, you shall use the epithet new—Mr New Broom. Ha!’

‘But why am I to be called only mister, while you take the title of earl?’

‘Because you are to be my henchman. I can’t say I like mister though. You may call yourself New Broom, Esq., or Sir New Broom; the henchman of an earl may very well be a knight.’

‘I see,’ said the middle-aged man slowly. ‘But don’t you think that New Broom, like Lord of the Future, betrays its meaning too nakedly?’

‘Right again,’ replied he, who will henceforth be called Earl Lavender. ‘And again Evolution comes promptly to my aid. You shall be called Mr Brumm.’

‘Why not Lord Brumm?’

‘The henchman of an earl could hardly be a peer. But no matter. Lord Brumm you shall be; to reject any suggestion what-

ever, might be to go in the very teeth of Evolution.'

It was in this way that Lord Brumm—to give the middle-aged man his easily-acquired title—not being a person of much resource, fell quietly into the extravagant humour of his companion.

CHAPTER II

HOW THEY DINED IN FLEET STREET

By the time Earl Lavender and Lord Brumm had chosen these names, they found themselves entering Trafalgar Square. Here Earl Lavender began to look about him, and to move with hesitation.

'I will not disguise from you, good Brougham,' he said at length, leaning against a lamp-post, 'that I am waiting for an indication.'

'An indication of what?'

'Of our next proceeding.'

'Possibly I can supply the indication.'

'Why should you doubt it? An indication may come from anybody and anything. Evolution knows not the insignificant.'

'Well, then, my lord,' rejoined Brumm, 'I and my stomach are strongly of opinion

that they have had only half a dinner, which seems to me to indicate that we ought to go somewhere and eat something. Whatever else may be fit or unfit about me, I have always had, and have now, a very fit appetite. The cold roast and cabinet-pudding were only a whet.'

'That is the indication; there can be no doubt of it,' said Earl Lavender; 'especially as it involves our first practical assay in the evolutionary life; and, to confess the truth, I am myself still very hungry. We must decide,' continued Earl Lavender, as they turned again into the Strand, 'which restaurant we shall honour.'

'The best in the Strand, I say.'

'Say rather the best restaurant for our purpose, and that I imagine will be found in Fleet Street. I understand there are restaurants in Fleet Street frequented by journalists. It behoves us, then, to make our first public demonstration of the evolutionary life in one of these old-fashioned eating-houses, the resort of editors, leader-writers and newsmongers, and the haunt of the

ghosts of the literary men of the eighteenth century. I do not mean that we are to angle for a report of our proceedings in to-morrow's paper, but our conduct and our words cannot fail to have a lasting effect on the pressmen who shall behold and hear them, and who, influenced by our sayings and doings, shall, in their writings, directly or indirectly, disseminate our doctrine. Now, as you are better acquainted with London than I am, can you lead the way to such a restaurant?'

'I can,' said Brumm, stepping out briskly. 'I can take you to an eating-house where you will get the best steak in England.'

'What is it called?'

'It is the old "Cap-and-Bells" in Deadman's Alley, that opens on the left a little before you come to Ludgate Hill.'

'Admirable! I have never been there; but I have often heard of it as a house much used by journalists.'

Earl Lavender and his henchman walked as rapidly as the crowded state of the streets would permit, and soon arrived at Deadman's

Alley. They at once entered the room on the ground floor of the "Cap-and-Bells," where Brumm ordered two steaks, and two pints of the old ale for which the inn was famous. He was in a considerable fright immediately after he had done so, remembering that as he had given the order he was directly responsible for the payment; but Earl Lavender, noticing his anxiety and understanding its cause, comforted him.

'Fear not, good Brumm,' he said; 'Evolution will protect its own.'

The cheerful confidence of Earl Lavender's words, and the engaging candour and serenity which marked his whole expression reassured Brumm in a way incomprehensible to himself, and he began to prattle, as grown men whose minds are not quite infinite sometimes will. He praised the time-worn tables and boxes, the fresh sawdust on the floor, the big buxom fireplace, and the picture of Goldsmith which hung in a recess. He remarked on the ponderous figure and grave expression of the head waiter, and derived much satisfaction from the agility and alert

looks of his assistant. The old ale he found a thought too sweet, but with such body and such a rich nut-brown hue! He whispered to Earl Lavender to note how sleek and solid two old gentlemen were who had just finished their steaks, and were waiting placidly for the stewed cheese. He got quite excited over their splendid condition.

‘That’s what English feeding can do,’ he said. ‘I’ll be bound these old fellows have dined here every day of their lives for the last twenty years. It was chops and steaks and beef-steak puddings that matured these smooth, pink cheeks and heaving shoulders. Their hair’s white, and they are over sixty both of them; but they’ve never known indigestion. They’ll go on dining here for another twenty years, and eat a steak without the least suspicion that it will be their last the very day they die. Such men stop simply; they can’t be said to die. I wonder now if they’re journalists. They don’t look like journalists; they’re not worried enough. No, they must be bank cashiers, or tailors and clothiers with old

established shops, or perhaps chemists and druggists.'

How long Lord Brumm would have gone on in this strain it is impossible to say. Just when he had made up his mind that the two old gentlemen were chemists and druggists, because they were so neat and clean and medicinal-looking, the ponderous head waiter brought in the steaks, with dimpled, mealy potatoes bursting from their jackets, and great hunks of household bread with a burnt crust half an inch deep. Earl Lavender, who had listened smilingly to his henchman's unexpected eloquence, admitted that the old fellows were passably fit in body; but as for their minds he was quite certain they hadn't any left.

'You will find, Brumm,' said Earl Lavender, 'that one of two things must be sacrificed by every man who lives to be over sixty—the mind, or the liver. I'll guarantee that these old boys, however philosophical or poetical they may have been in their young days, could no more secrete thought now than a statue of Cybele could suckle the Found-

ling Hospital ; but for the due distillation of a healthy supply of bile I doubt not it would be difficult to beat them. Bile or thought, good Brumm, at your grand climacteric you must dispense for good with the one or the other.'

'God send it to be thought then! But I fear very much that it will be my liver that will fail me, because I have had already some fits of indigestion. But don't tell me of such things just now. Here is the finest steak in England, and I am as hungry as if I hadn't eaten to-day.'

Hardly had they begun to their second dinner, when a tall young gentleman, looking very fresh and pleasant, sauntered into the room, and sat down at the same table with Earl Lavender and his henchman. This young gentleman had a round face, a short nose, large grey eyes, a low, broad brow over which his brown hair fell gracefully, and a mouth which seemed always about to burst into joyful speech. His frock-coat was fashionably cut, his scarf was of a very special pattern, and he had

a mauve flower in his buttonhole. Lord Brumm smiled to him as soon as he sat down, and intimated tentatively his opinion of the weather. The eloquent-mouthed young gentleman, speaking with something of a drawl, but in very musical tones, thought on the whole that the weather was pretty much of the kind Lord Brumm had hinted at. He then ordered a steak, but the steaks were done.

‘How’s that?’ asked the young gentleman.

‘It’s half-past eight, sir,’ replied the ponderous waiter in a ridiculously small voice, but with an accent and an air which said as plain as words that he was master of his subject; and that steaks, as a rule, were ‘off’ by eight o’clock, and sometimes as soon as half-past seven; and that he, the ponderous waiter, wondered very much at the eloquent-mouthed young gentleman expecting steaks at that time of night in the ‘Cap-and-Bells;’ and that, as for Earl Lavender and Lord Brumm, considering when they came in, they might think themselves very lucky in having found steaks still ‘on.’

The young gentleman accepted the implied reproof, and resigning himself to the inevitable, ordered a chop and kidneys, with a tankard of stout-and-bitter.

‘Don’t you like the old ale?’ asked Lord Brumm.

‘As I find it too heavy,’ replied the young gentleman, ‘even with a steak, you can hardly expect me to drink it with a chop. But,’ he added, with a bright smile, as if suddenly recollecting himself, ‘if it will be of any service to you I shall countermand my order. Probably it offends you that anyone should drink anything but old ale?’

‘By no means—not at all,’ said Lord Brumm, astonished and flurried by the excessive courtesy of the young gentleman. ‘Indeed I think I shall have a drop of stout in my tankard.’

‘You mustn’t—you mustn’t,’ said the young gentleman. ‘Stout is worse than thunder for old ale.’

‘Do you tell me so?’ cried Lord Brumm, very much impressed by the

elegance and easy air of superiority which characterised the young gentleman.

'Are you going upstairs?' drawled the new-comer.

'Upstairs?' echoed Lord Brumm.

'Yes. The Guild of Prosemen.'

'What is the Guild of Prosemen?'

'Oh!' said the young gentleman, 'I thought I had seen you at a former meeting.'

'Of the Guild of Prosemen!' exclaimed Lord Brumm. 'Do I look like a Proseman?'

'My dear sir!' cried the young gentleman, deprecating the personal remark, 'I thought you had once accompanied a member of the Guild. Members bring their friends sometimes.'

'No; I have never been,' said Lord Brumm.

'Would you like to attend a meeting?'

'I should like it very much,' said Lord Brumm.

'Then come with me to-night.'

'We shall be delighted,' said Earl

Lavender, bowing and smiling to the young gentleman, who returned his salute very graciously.

‘My friend here,’ continued Earl Lavender, ‘is Lord Brumm, and I am the Earl of Lavender. How shall we address you?’

‘I am called Hubert Ware,’ said the young gentleman, dwelling with fondness on each syllable of his name, and not in the least disconcerted by the titles of his chance acquaintances.

‘The Guild of Prosemen,’ said Earl Lavender, ‘consists of a set of literary men, I suppose?’

‘Yes,’ replied Hubert Ware; ‘they may be called literary men.’

‘Many of them possibly engaged on daily and weekly papers?’

‘All of them, more or less.’

‘This is very fortunate,’ said Earl Lavender. ‘Or rather I should say, this is exactly as I expected. You must know, Mr Ware, that Lord Brumm and I have started to-night upon a great mission. It is our purpose to convert the world to Evolution, not so much

by word of mouth as by living the evolutionary life. Knowing "The Cap-and-Bells" by repute, we came here trusting to find an assembly of journalists who should be deeply impressed by witnessing our first deeds as active Evolutionists ; for we intend to offer in our persons a demonstration of the survival of the fittest.'

The young gentleman, half of whose creed was coolness and self-possession, overcome in spite of himself by the extraordinary nature of the announcement he had just heard, opened his round eyes very wide, while his eloquent lips parted in a puzzled smile.

'The faith of my friend and first disciple,' continued Earl Lavender, 'is yet feeble, and I expect, when he found this room almost empty, he began to doubt the power of Evolution ; indeed, I myself was somewhat perplexed by the absence of journalists. Now, however, the most unbelieving must be convinced, because not only are there journalists here, but a special conclave has been provided to be the first recipients of my message. And this assembly must not be set down to

chance; it is here awaiting me by the direct operation of an undiscovered evolutionary law.'

Hubert Ware, having speedily regained his self-possession, and having formed his own opinion as to the state of Earl Lavender's mind, declared that he had not the least doubt of the truth of what he had just heard.

'I am very glad to find you so receptive,' said Earl Lavender. 'It augurs well for the success of my mission that the first two men to whom I explain it are at once persuaded of its truth. How will it be received by the Guild of Prosemen, do you think?'

'It will have, I should say, rather a dubious reception from them. They are, individually, charming fellows; but in the lump, and as a body corporate, they are not charming.'

'Are you a Proseman?'

'I believe I am generally regarded as belonging to the Guild.'

'Then you are soiling your own nest.'

Hubert Ware raised his eyebrows at the directness of the charge; but he took it in

good part and replied with even more than his usual courtesy of manner that he himself, although in the Guild, was not of it, and that he attended the meetings only occasionally on the chance of seeing another Proseman, in whose company he found considerable pleasure, and who, like himself, was a black sheep in the fold.

‘This friend of mine,’ he continued, ‘is a strange man, who lives somewhere in the northern wilds of London, supporting himself nobody exactly knows how, and appearing at uncertain intervals in Fleet Street and Piccadilly. He is a Scotchman, and a very special blend of the shrewdness, simplicity and fervour which characterise his race. He possesses the gift, unusual even in an Englishman, of recognising merit in others, and expresses his admiration sincerely, and without flattery, expecting no return. He admires some things in me, and it is really to see me that he comes to the meetings of the Guild of Prosemen. I expect to find him upstairs to-night.’

‘And the other members?’ said Earl

Lavender, much pleased with the frank egotism of Hubert Ware.

‘There are one or two besides my friend and me who hardly ever attend the meetings. I don’t know them intimately, but I gather from that fact that they must have many superior qualities, in their own opinions at any rate. As for the others, why, you will see them when we go upstairs.’

When Hubert Ware had discussed his chop and kidneys, Earl Lavender said,—

‘Gentlemen,’ including with a glance and a wave of his hand the waiters and the two sleek old fellows who were finishing the toddy with which they had washed down the stewed cheese, ‘gentlemen, you have to-night assisted at the making of history. What you have seen appears to be an event which occurs a hundred times a day in the “Cap-and-Bells”—two men eating steaks and drinking old ale. Yet there can be no doubt that from this simple act a new epoch dates. Believing firmly in our own fitness and in the power of Evolution, Lord Brumm and myself entered here and gave our order

without a penny in our pockets. We had scarcely begun upon the steaks when Evolution manifested itself in the person of Mr Hubert Ware, providing in him a means of defraying the cost of our refreshment. Other penniless people have dared to dine in restaurants, but we are the first to challenge Evolution in that way to a direct justification of the law of the survival of the fittest. Gentlemen, you may congratulate yourselves on seeing, and on having lived to see, the first day of the year one of the Evolutionary Era.'

No sooner had Earl Lavender concluded his astonishing address than the two old gentlemen simultaneously shouted,—

'Waiter!'

When the ponderous waiter, confused rather than impressed by what he had heard, attended to the call, both the old gentlemen again simultaneously said, in a whisper overheard by Earl Lavender,—

'That man's mad;' and one of them added, 'Tell his keeper to take him away; he's not safe.'

Gentlemen,' said Earl Lavender, with perfect complacency, 'it becomes you to make a charge of madness against me. I told my friend Lord Brumm a little ago that you have no minds, and I am convinced of it. As you are possibly unaware of the fact, I may as well explain to you how you have arrived at this not altogether unenviable condition. In your youth, I judge from the contour of your heads that you thought and imagined as much as the average young man; but since the strongest convictions you ever entertained were that money makes the mare to go, and that cakes and ale are good, you gradually ceased to think until your minds stopped working altogether, and as your brains grew atrophied your livers increased in power. Now, I suppose, you have digestive apparatuses unmatched in proficiency, while your heads, instead of blossoming like an evergreen in a bowpot, have changed into cinerary urns, containing the ashes of your thought and fancy, and rudely carved with half-intelligible hieroglyphics concerning religion and morality,

and copy-book mottoes for the conduct of life. You are perfect types; I recognise that, and would not have you other than you are. I merely wish to let you know that I understand you thoroughly, and to give you the means when you come to die of consoling yourselves with the reflection that you were understood and pardoned by at least one fellow-creature. Most men I have been told die miserable because they think everybody has misunderstood them. Rejoice, therefore, for that lot cannot now be yours.'

'Waiter,' cried the two old fellows as soon as Earl Lavender had concluded, 'the bill.'

They paid the score in silence, seized their hats and umbrellas, and rose, in a body as it were, to overwhelm Earl Lavender. Having crossed the room to the table at which he sat, they opened their mouths and closed them with a parched sound, while Earl Lavender smiled encouragingly.

'Sir!' they at last managed to ejaculate, looking towards each other for support.

'How—' continued one of them; but,

finding himself unaccompanied, he stopped as if he had been shot.

‘I know what you would say,’ said Earl Lavender blandly. ‘You are astonished at the accurate knowledge of your characters which I, an utter stranger, have shown; but you must know that to one who is in all probability the fittest human being at present breathing, such a display of intuition is a mere bagatelle.’

‘Sir!’ thundered the two old fellows with starting eyes, the foam flying from their mouths, and their umbrellas beating the ground like the tails of enraged animals. ‘Sir!’ Then, in a burst of pathos, reproach, anger and pride, helping themselves on to the points of their toes with their umbrellas, and appealing to the ceiling with their hats, they exclaimed together, ‘We are twins! We—’

Either they felt that the statement of their relationship was in itself sufficient to overwhelm Earl Lavender, or that they were not about to say the same thing, or else they had nothing further to add, for they came down on

their heels with a jerk, and their mouths closed tightly on the word 'we.'

'Ah!' said Earl Lavender; 'I understand you more fully now. When in a double birth both children live, it is almost invariably the case that they grow up next door to idiots. Twins always rank low in the scale of fitness; I am amazed that you have survived so long; it is only to be accounted for by the total decay of intellect.'

'Sir!' again thundered the two old fellows, outraged beyond endurance, raising the sawdust as they smote the floor with their umbrellas, and looking to everybody for sympathy and finding none—even the waiters were laughing. 'Sir, you—'

But they could get no further. Crimson with inarticulate indignation, they stuck on their hats with a helpless flourish, tucked their umbrellas under their arms, and strutted to the door. There they shook the sawdust from their feet, and left the 'Cap-and-Bells' with their minds made up never to return.

The bar of the 'Cap-and-Bells' was opposite the door of the dining-room, and the barmaid,

on hearing the loud and angry voices of the aged twins, had summoned the proprietor. He emerged from his office just as the two old fellows were leaving in wrath, and recognising them for regular customers, he asked the waiter what was the matter.

‘Well, sir,’ said the ponderous waiter, opening his ponderous jaws and emitting his ludicrously thin voice, which he accompanied with a sheepish smile, ‘I dunno who was to blame.’

‘Blame! What do you mean by blame?’ asked the proprietor.

‘Ain’t there somebody to blame?’ said the ponderous waiter, still smiling coyly, and appealing to his agile assistant.

‘I shouldn’t say as ’ow there was anybody to blame, sir,’ said the second waiter, who spoke with great rapidity, and with a meek but effusive manner, as if he were apologising for the world at large. ‘This ’ere gent allowed as ’e was a sort a conjury-ledgery-man, up in tellin’ fort’nes, an’ gettin’ other people to pay for ’im. An’ the twins makes out in a manner *sauty-waussy*—which ’as

always puzzled me as bein' more proper to potatoes except it be a pig's whisper, as Pat says—that 'e's mad; which 'e, 'earin', gives 'em a sample of 'is conkology, an' tells 'em wot 'e thinks of 'em, which wasn't much, an' quite right too; but them twins couldn't stand bein' told as 'ow their livers was overgrow'd and their 'eads was dustbins, so they ups an' says, "Sir!" they says, a-stampin' with their mushes, an' fearin' no foe, 'Sir!' They says it four times, an' this gent 'e always rubs in the pickle, till at last they gives it 'im 'ot, an' tells 'im plump an' plain as 'ow they was twins, they was, an' no more bones about it. "So much the worse for you," says this gent, a-surprisin' of us all, an' the coolest I ever see. "But I wouldn't change you, not me," says 'e. "Twins an' idiots you was born, an' twins an' idiots you will be, s'elp me bob!" 'e says. Then they hollers "Sir!" again, and grows very red in the face, an' tries to use bad langwidge, but it won't come; so they busts up, an' you saw 'em go, sir.'

Mine host looked from the assistant waiter

to Earl Lavender, and from Earl Lavender to the assistant waiter.

‘I confess,’ he said, ‘the matter is not quite clear to me,’

‘No,’ said Earl Lavender ; ‘this amusing young man has considerable inventive and dramatic gifts, but clearness is not his forte. I like him, though. You’re very entertaining,’ he cried to the assistant waiter, nodding to him, and contemplating him with much interest. The assistant waiter, all unconscious of his merit, blushed and hid behind the broad figure of his chief. ‘It can be stated very simply,’ continued Earl Lavender, addressing the proprietor of the ‘Cap-and-Bells.’ ‘Those two charming John Bulls who have just gone received with some scorn an important announcement which I made, and as I intend to insist upon the most courteous toleration from all who are unable to give credence to my message, I felt called upon to rebuke them. It was hardly a rebuke either. I merely pointed out to them that they were no longer able to perform the function of thinking beings,

rather to show them by what means they might excuse themselves than by way of reprimand. And now,' turning to Hubert Ware, 'I think we ought to visit the Guild of Prosemen.'

The proprietor of the 'Cap-and-Bells,' quite in the dark, with a dry 'good evening, gentlemen,' returned to his office; and as soon as he had gone, Hubert Ware paid for the three dinners, having enjoyed himself so much that he felt quite willing to pay for thirty. Then this pleasant young gentleman led the way to the upper room in which the Guild of Prosemen held their sessions.

CHAPTER III

HOW EARL LAVENDER ADDRESSED THE GUILD OF
PROSEMEN, AND HOW RORISON DEFENDED
HIMSELF UNNECESSARILY


WHEN they entered the Prosemen's chamber in the 'Cap-and-Bells,' Hubert Ware's friend, the Scotch Proseman, was sitting in the centre of a semi-circle composed of nine or ten men of various ages and British nationalities. Hubert shook hands with the Scot, but did not introduce his new acquaintances. Seats were appropriated and whiskies ordered, and then the business of the evening, which had been interrupted by the entrance of the new-comers, was decorously resumed. This was the discussion of some details regarding the publication of a joint-book by the Guild of Prosemen. As soon

as it was concluded, Earl Lavender rose to speak.

‘Gentlemen,’ he began ; but Hubert Ware interrupted him, and gravely introduced him to the Guild of Prosemen as his friend the Earl of Lavender.

‘The noble Earl,’ he said, ‘has a most important communication to make, for which I crave your best attention.’

‘Gentlemen,’ resumed Earl Lavender, bowing to the astounded Prosemen, ‘I expected—you must allow me to say, I expected to find a more intelligent audience. By “more intelligent,” I mean a more open-minded audience, an audience less occupied with their own affairs. I heard you were journalists, and had pictured you to myself as a species apart, a sensitised, spiritualised order of beings whose minds would be, as it were, deflected and agitated, not only by the faintest rumours of mere news, but by the approach of even the most insignificant change in the intellectual magnetism of the world. Instead of this I find an assembly so deeply engaged in an attempt to further




their own interests as to be almost entirely unimpressed by my entrance. And yet, gentlemen, in me you behold the fittest human being at present breathing, a man evolved for the purpose of changing the mental attitude of the world. To-night I enter upon my mission, and came here, accompanied by my henchman and first disciple, Lord Brumm, to give my first practical demonstration of the working of the law of the survival of the fittest. Mr Hubert Ware, my second disciple, will bear witness to the success of the experiment, for it was he whom Evolution provided to pay for the steaks and ale.'

'Yes,' said Hubert gravely, 'I had that great honour.'

'Again I say,' continued Earl Lavender, 'that your appearance and proceedings have been very disappointing, and yet it behoves me to declare my mission to you, for out of the unfit, Evolution may perhaps most conveniently provide testimony to the fitness of the fit—of the fittest. Know, then, that I wish the dogma of Evolution to permeate

your writings. I shall give you a watchword, and you may think out a whole system for yourselves. I understand that is always the way with new systems, the founder has an idea, and makes a few remarks, which his followers work up. My idea you know ; I have already made several remarks, and I shall now give you a watchword, "The fit shall survive, and Earl Lavender is the fittest." This you may use for a battle cry. It is customary, I understand, on the promulgation of a new system, for the prophet or founder to prescribe rules of conduct. In this matter I propose to give my followers ample liberty, only exacting from journalists and authors constant allusion and reference to me and my mission.'

Earl Lavender abruptly ended in a dead silence. The bulk of the Prosemen smiled tolerantly, but none of them seemed disposed to venture on a remark, as the titles of their visitors and Earl Lavender's unembarrassed delivery and vigorous address had somewhat perplexed them.



‘Very noble!’ whispered Hubert Ware in Earl Lavender’s ear.

The Scot, in a tumult of delight, cried across the room,—

‘I wish I had imagined you! Are you real flesh and blood? or did you imagine him, Ware? or is he imagining himself?’

‘I am being evolved,’ said Earl Lavender. ‘There is no such thing as imagination. Evolution is all and in all. But what reply have the Guild of Prosemen to make to my appeal?’

As might have been expected, the Scot, full of Bannockburn, as all Scots become as soon as they cross the Border, and not untinctured with the white wine of his country, got upon his feet before anybody else the moment Earl Lavender requested a definite reply.

‘My lord,’ he began, ‘I will answer you categorically. But first, let me tell you I am peculiarly qualified to give an impartial reply to your animadversions, being well-known for the lukewarmth of my allegiance to the Guild, as a very irregular attendant at their

meetings, as one who seldom reads any prose, and as a non-contributor to their book. But my main qualification is that I am a Scotchman. As all Englishmen and Irishmen know well, every Scot is vain, shrewd, pragmatical, supercilious; profuse in his admiration when pleased, and blind to inferiority in the things and people he likes; indifferent to hostile opinion though resenting its expression; demanding more than his fair share of elbow-room; always thrusting himself forward and willing to accept responsibility of any kind. He never forgets Bannockburn; and remembers Homildon Hill, Flodden Field, Pinkie Cleugh, and the many defeats the Scots sustained at the hands of the English as even more marvellous proofs of the greatness of his race than the few victories they obtained over their old hereditary enemies. That a mere handful of people in a narrow strip of land, penned up between the Highlanders on the north and the English Borderers on the south, should have retained a separate existence after so many over-

whelming disasters, each sufficient in itself to have brought into lasting subjection a much more extensive and more populous territory, is probably as remarkable a testimony to the fitness of the Scot as he himself thinks it is. In his conceit he regards himself as superior to all other Europeans, the representative, wherever he goes, of the only unconquered country between the Atlantic and the Ural mountains. He knows now that he is a northern Englishman and is proud of it; but he is prouder of the strange history which has specialised him as the hardiest and intensest member of the great family whose heritage is the seas and the continents. He is jealous of his name, and although he prays for the time when man to man the warl' o'er shall brithers be for a' that, he means to retain all his idiosyncrasies as long as he can. Not a pleasant person, the Scot, you think; and I admit that he would indeed be quite insufferable if it were not for two things, the abiding reverence for capacity in any race and any individual

which makes Boswell tolerable, and raises him in that respect to the level of Carlyle; and the deep sense of humour which in Carlyle atones for his barbarous self-worship and ruthless spite at humanity, and the lack of which kept Boswell remorseless in his folly. This digression, my lord, I felt called upon to make in order to explain to you how impossible it is, do what he may, and however much it may pain him, for a Scot to hold any other than a mean opinion of all other peoples. But if I follow this question further, I shall only involve myself in digression after digression; and so to the point. Briefly then, and in the first place, you are to understand that we are much more intelligent than we look. Secondly and lastly, we are not disposed to permeate our writings with this new doctrine of Evolution until we know more about it.'

The murmurs and exclamations excited by the Scot's uncalled for *apologia pro vita sua* increased in volume towards its conclusion, and when he resumed his seat clamour filled

the room. It was fully a minute before the noise subsided, and then a handsome Irish Proseman, who had been foremost in demanding order, moved that no notice should be taken either of Earl Lavender's address, or of the reply of Rorison, the vain Scotchman.'

'Rorison!' said Earl Lavender in an undertone to Hubert Ware. 'A very suitable name for so unkempt an individual.'

'Yes,' said Hubert; 'he is rather dusty and heathery.'

In appearance Rorison was pretty much the Englishman's typical Scot; short and broad, with high cheek bones, rough red hair and beard, deep-set blue eyes, a nose somewhat in the air, and a big mouth.

'Mr Rorison,' said Earl Lavender, resenting the marked appearance and individuality of the man, 'as I am the founder of the Evolutionary system—'

'Order, order!' from all the Prosemen.

'I demand to be heard,' cried Earl Lavender, rising to his feet, unruffled but firm.

The cries of order continued however;

and Hubert Ware, whispering to Earl Lavender that he must bide his time, as it was quite evident that the evolutionary moment had passed, persuaded his new friend to sit down again.

‘It seems to me,’ said a deep-voiced Proseman when quiet was again restored, ‘that we ought to indicate by a resolution of some kind our displeasure at what has just taken place. Rorison at all events should be censured.’

‘No,’ said a tall English Proseman, ‘let us proceed as if nothing had happened. The episode is past.’

‘I move,’ said the handsome Irish Proseman, ‘that the episode did not take place.’

This proposal, charmingly Hibernian, having been adopted with laughter and applause, the Prosemen proceeded to the reading of what each considered the best paragraph he had written since their last meeting. But before they began the waiter was summoned to replenish the glasses. As the Prosemen were about to give their orders an idea occurred to Earl Lavender.

‘Gentlemen,’ he said, ‘we must have champagne to-night. Waiter, a magnum of Mumm.’

The waiter, who attended to the Prosemen’s chamber, had not seen or heard anything of Earl Lavender’s conduct in the dining-room, and although somewhat surprised at his order, was about to execute it, when Hubert Ware bade him wait.

‘My lord,’ said Ware aside to Earl Lavender, ‘is it a circumstance that I have barely five shillings left?’

‘Not at all,’ replied Earl Lavender. ‘I beg you not to pay any more money for me to-night. Evolution is my banker. All right, waiter.’

Here, however, another difficulty arose. It was one of the bye-laws of the Guild of Prosemen that every man should pay his own shot.


‘Individually, of course, we are millionaires,’ said the Proseman with the deep voice. ‘In our corporate capacity we are paupers, and as we never treat, we make it a rule never to be treated.’

‘But, gentlemen,’ said Earl Lavender, ‘this is a very special occasion. To-night marks the beginning of a new epoch. Besides, there has been some friction. You have proved to be in a less prepared mood for the reception of my doctrine than I anticipated, and have resented my criticism and plain-dealing. Champagne is the best liniment for abrasions of the spirit. Waiter, bring the Mumm.’

As no further opposition was made, the champagne was brought, and forthwith all the Prosemen who were prepared read or recited their paragraphs in turn—charming paragraphs, eloquent paragraphs, critical, poetical, philosophical paragraphs, all of them interesting, all of them well-written.

The prose being done, Earl Lavender rose at once and addressed the Guild of Prosemen for the second time.

‘Very admirable, indeed, gentlemen,’ he said; ‘but all this random writing must end. With unerring intuition, as becomes the fittest of created beings, I perceive that the final cause of your existence is to become my



disciples. I ask you to set your intended book aside, and to write evolutionary prose celebrating me and—'

At this point the murmurs with which Earl Lavender's attempt at a second speech had been accompanied burst into a shout. Most of the Prosemen stood up and shook their fists, despatching with one voice but quite good-humouredly him and his mission to the nether regions.

Earl Lavender folded his arms and smiled at them. He then petitioned for a further hearing, but as the gesticulation and outcry increased, he touched Lord Brumm on the shoulder, and crying in a voice heard above the din: 'In spite of yourselves, you must help me and my cause, for you will have to pay for the champagne,' he left the room followed by his quaking henchman.

The waiter who had brought the magnum of Mumm stopped the pair at the door of the inn and asked who was to pay.

'The Guild of Prosemen are defraying the entertainment of their guests,' answered Earl Lavender.

‘Hansom!’ he cried; and bundling the utterly demoralised Brumm into a cab, he bade the driver take them to Piccadilly Circus.

CHAPTER IV

OF THE FIRST MEETING BETWEEN MRS SCAMLER
AND MAUD EMBLEM, AND HOW THEY SUPPED
TOGETHER, AND WHAT MRS SCAMLER SAID

HARDLY had Earl Lavender and Lord Brumm left the 'Cap-and-Bells' when a young lady entered the dining-room. The sawdust of the old inn was seldom trodden by feminine feet. In winter, city gentlemen and journalists sometimes brought their wives, or sisters, or sweethearts, to taste the great steak-pudding which the proprietor cut up every Saturday in presence of his customers; and in summer, a fair American or other gentle tourist would come and gaze at the picture of Goldsmith and the old fireplace, and wonder at the solid Londoners, the slabs of beef they ate, and the tankards

of beer they drank. But although the ponderous waiter was thus not altogether unused to the appearance of the fair sex in the dining-room of the 'Cap-and-Bells,' he was astonished beyond measure to behold a lady cross his threshold at eleven o'clock at night. His first impulse was to warn her away; but dull as his apprehension was, he saw clearly that this was not only a respectable young person, but one of unusual grace and beauty. Of middle height, and about twenty years of age, she had, besides the graceful bearing common to well-shaped women, that ease and nobility of carriage which, in the new generation, begins to approve the physical training of girls. Sweetness, cheerfulness and dignity mingled in her expression. Her face, retaining still much of the roundness of girlhood, promised to be a perfect oval. Her complexion was pure red and white; her eyes were large and black, and her dark crisp hair was divided plainly in the centre, and coiled behind. As a crown to her many perfections, this handsome and beautiful girl possessed a low, rich voice,

which made a pleasant impression even on the dull waiter when she asked him if at that moment there were two gentlemen in the 'Cap-and-Bells,' 'one tall and young with a dark moustache, and rather striking in appearance; and the other stout and much older.'

'Two gentlemen, lady,' said the ponderous waiter in his ridiculously thin voice. 'No; not at this identical moment. But the twins were here.'

'Oh! they're not twins,' said the young lady, smiling frankly.

The waiter didn't remember another pair of gentlemen, but he referred to his assistant.

'It wouldn't be c'rrect,' said that effusive and apologetic young man, 'to say as there was two gents 'ere like them two o' yours, lady; but there was three that come near it. Mr Ware, 'as dines 'ere often, 'ad two friends with 'im, but it weren't 'im; 'e ain't neither stout nor dark. But 'is friends was stout and dark, an' 'e 'ad stout and bitter, as 'e always do 'ave. An' they was particular strikin'; an' a moustache one of 'em 'ad:

a sort o' patter cove 'e were, like them niggers wot talks straight on round the clock, with umberellies as big as 'ole women a-smashin' of the table at the 'alls. 'E did give it them unfort'nit twins. 'E came it over 'em in a style, as you might say, two 'undered words a minute at the school o' short'and. Oh! 'e's a dook, an' 'e's gone, miss. Both gone. 'Ansom.'

'Did you hear what direction they gave the driver?' asked the young lady eagerly.

'No, miss. Upstairs may 'ave 'eard. 'E saw 'em off.'

'Oh! could you find out for me?'

The agile assistant sprang to the foot of the stairs, and cried up at the pitch of his voice,—

'Hi, there! William!'

'I 'ear you, George,' replied William from the bar.

'Oh, you're there, are you?' said George turning round. 'Why didn't you say so before, an' not 'ave me shoutin' up one chimney an' down another. Where did

them two blokes go as made the twins sit up?’

‘Dunno.’

‘E dunno, miss; ‘e didn’t ‘ear,’ explained the agile assistant, rushing into the dining-room. ‘You see, these sort o’ hintertainin’ coves, when they leaves one place an’ takes an ‘ansom to another, don’t let the street know where they’re goin’. There’s coppers an’ lamp-posts about, an’ there ain’t no need to be familiar.’

The young lady looked as if the waiter’s last remark expressed her own sentiments at that particular instant. She only said, however,—

‘I am too tired to do any more to-night,’ and selecting a comfortable corner right below the picture of Goldsmith, she sank down on the worn seat and leant her arms on the table. ‘Waiter,’ she said, ‘could I have something to eat here?’

‘Well, I don’t know, miss,’ said the waiter rubbing his ponderous chin, and ready on the emergence of the least difficulty to refer to his assistant; ‘something light, now?’

‘I think I’m hungry enough to eat a chop,’ said the young lady.

‘Chops are off, ma’am,’ replied the waiter promptly, removing his hand from his chin, and sticking it in his side.

He liked to talk of things he knew about.

‘Well then, a steak?’ suggested the young lady.

‘Steaks off since seven-thirty,’ said the waiter, with increased confidence, rejoiced at the turn the conversation had taken.

‘What can you give me, then?’

‘Tripe, ma’am; tripe and onions.’

‘Tripe,’ said the young lady thoughtfully. ‘I never ate tripe, but I’ve often heard of it. I suppose people do eat it, waiter? There’s no mystery about it?’

‘Oh, no, ma’am; no mystery about tripe.’

‘Is it good?’

‘Good!’ exclaimed the head waiter, enchanted to find himself still master of the subject, and quite excited with the brilliancy of his own replies. ‘I ain’t an authority, you know, on tripe in general, but the tripe we serve here twice a week, ma’am, is as

good as the steaks, and they're the best in London.'

'Oh,' said the young lady, 'please bring me some then, and a glass of claret.'

The assistant conveyed the young lady's order to the proper quarter, and the head waiter retired to his stance near the door. His musings there were speedily disturbed by a tap on the shoulder, and, looking round, to his unbounded amazement he found himself confronted by another lady—a matronly-looking person clad in black silk with black feathers in her bonnet. She had touched the waiter with her gold eye-glasses very gingerly, as if that optical instrument had also been a magical one, with the power when forcibly applied of turning waiters into stone; and when she had attracted the attention of the ponderous head at the 'Cap-and-Bells' she settled her *pince-nez* on the bridge of her comely nose, with a loving care which showed that she knew perfectly well how their gold rims and dazzling pebbles would light up her shrewd, merry face.

'Oh, Mr Waiter!' she said, 'has Mr

Gurdon of Nettleby - Kingscroft been here?'

'Mr who?' queried the head waiter more shrilly than usual, making the matronly lady start and look him all over, wondering apparently if his voice had issued from a watch-pocket or a buttonhole.


'Mr Gurdon of Nettleby-Kingscroft,' she repeated.

But the head waiter had already signalled to his assistant, and that young man at once took up his parable.

'Mr Gurdon of Nettleby - Kingscroft, ma'am,' he said, exhibiting much excitement, and consequently speaking in a more apologetic style than ever. 'A middling-sized gent; fills 'is skin an' 'is clothes well; eats and drinks 'earty, an' goes about with a tall young straight-tipper who lays it off sizable—'

'Jillikins!' interposed the head waiter. 'You don't mean to say she's after these rum coves too?'

'I know'd it,' chuckled the assistant. 'Double-barrelled breach o' promise case.'



‘How dare you!’ cried the matronly lady.
‘How dare you! I demand to know where Mr Gurdon is.’

‘We can’t tell you, ma’am,’ said the head waiter, again able to speak to the point.
‘He left here about quarter an hour ago in a hansom, and that’s all we know.’

‘How disappointing!’ said the lady with a sigh. ‘I’m too tired to do any more to-night. Can I have something to eat?’

‘Certainly, ma’am. Tripe and onions.’

‘Oh, I love tripe and onions! Give me some, and a pot of porter.’

The matronly lady then looked about her, and regarding the beautiful girl in the corner with a favourable eye, pulled off her gloves and sat down close beside her without more ado.

‘I have just heard what you said,’ remarked the young lady; ‘and do you know, I think we are searching for the same gentlemen.’

‘No!’ exclaimed the other. ‘But, of course, nothing could be likelier. Eligible

men won't marry now; they simply won't do it, that's all that's about it.'

The beautiful girl blushed a fiery-red and made play with her napkin.

'My dear, I mean no offence,' said the matronly lady. 'But when a woman comes alone to London hunting a man it isn't her father or her brother she's after, nor her husband either. Husbands never run away of themselves. They're driven away, and the wives don't follow them. It's when they're engaged, and the marriage-day is just at hand, that the men cut and run, and the women chase them. Its *fang-dé-seeaycle* that does it, my dear, and education, and reading French. When I was younger, I got a dozen offers every spring until I married the late Mr Scamler. Then, after he died I was caught up in the very apex of education, and my offers dropped off—except on one day when I had several hundred, as I'll tell you about—to one or two in the season, like leaves in the forest, my dear, when autumn, etc.,—Byron, you know. But it wasn't because autumn had blown

with me. But, my dear, here am I talking to you as if I'd known you all my life, and you may be, for anything — my dear, here's the tripe! And you're taking tripe too! Now, we *must* be better acquainted. By-the-bye, do you know Mr Gurdon?'

The young lady did not know Mr Gurdon.

'Well, my dear, he is a very remarkable man,' said the relict of the late Mr Scamler. 'When Mr Scamler died he left me very comfortable, I must say that. Two hundred a year in the—what's the per cents.?—I never know now, but it's not so much as it was, though of course we have the consolation of knowing that it's for the good of the country, and when duty calls and can't be avoided there's no use grumbling—and five hundred pounds his life was insured for. Having nothing to do, no relations, no children—except an uncle who died in Australia, poor man, when I was a girl—I gave myself up to the wave of educational excitement that swept over the land. I bought a cyclopædia, and took in the *Woman's Educator*, and studied everything, my dear—

at first : things I'd never heard of before and don't remember the names of now. But I soon settled down to drawing and French exclusively ; and the progress I made was surprising. It was model drawing that I liked best. I hadn't a comb—or cone, is it?—yes, cone ; so I placed a bandbox in positions that you wouldn't have imagined it possible, and couldn't have known from the drawings that it was a bandbox. There was no difficulty I didn't master. And the same with French. Masculine, feminine—*beau, belle, doo, dela* ; singular, plural—*cheval, chevoux* ; to be or not to be—*eightur, avoir* ; and so on—*parlez vous, porky, parsk*, and all without a master.'

Here Mrs Scamler who had been nibbling a little during her communicative monologue, took a long breath and a sip of porter, and gave herself up to the enjoyment of her supper. With a pleasant smile on her comely face she ate steadily for fully three minutes. Her companion, wondering much, and vastly amused at the talkative widow, was also busy with her knife and fork.

‘Well, as I was saying,’ resumed Mrs Scamler, having taken another sip of porter, ‘Mr Gurdon, whom you don’t know, is a very remarkable man. But I didn’t make his acquaintance until I had given up French and model drawing. I couldn’t describe to you the effect of my studies on the inhabitants of Nettleby-Kingscroft. The very milkman spoke in awestruck whispers, and made his pony walk when he came within a hundred yards of my door. My popularity and fame were beyond anything—for a time, only for a time. Just when I was beginning to reap the reward of my arduous labours—a teapot! I could draw a teapot with ease, and could read short sentences, made up of the words I knew at sight, just like English—the tide turned against me, and a deputation came, informal, of the chemist’s, the school-master’s, and the butcher’s wife—wives should it be?—and invited me pointedly to attend the Dorcas meetings. You could have knocked me down with a feather. But I plucked up heart and told them no, I was going to be an artist and a linguist. There

was all the late Mr Scamler's clothes they could have, and I would subscribe a guinea a year, but attend their scandalous meetings I would not, for I'm sure it was better to be studying French and model drawing. But the butcher's wife, a very vulgar woman, said to me,—“Mrs Scamler,” she said, “*do* you study French, ma'am?” “I do, indeed,” I said; “two hours a day.” “Then, ma'am,” she says, “we call upon you to give it up.” “Give it up!” I said. “Why should I give up what your daughter does?” for I knew her daughter learnt French at school. “Because, ma'am,” she said, “it can't be for no good end, and if it were people wouldn't believe it. My daughter learns French at school. But what for? Because it's an accomplishment that all girls have. They take it like the measles and the chickenpox; but do you suppose they go on having it after they're done school? No; and if a grown woman takes the measles, it's bad on her; and if a widow takes to learning French we know what that means.” “It's a very immoral language,” said the school-

master's wife, for she hadn't paid the butcher's bill for six months, as I happened to know. "Shocking," said the chemist's wife. "I knew a woman who read French, and she ran away from her husband, and died of consumption. For it's in the language. My husband says its rotten and corrupt, and he ought to know, being a chemist by examination. Mrs Scamler, you need a pill or a draught or something, for I declare you look quite dissolute already." And me only beginning irregular verbs! But I was so taken aback that I didn't know what to say. So I gave them a glass of sherry and a biscuit, and told them I would think of it. And they pressed my hand very hard at leaving, and sighed, and looked up, and the schoolmaster's wife used her handky. I was in a fine taking, I can tell you, and went to my *Woman's Educators*, and examined the French language; and, do you know, it seemed to have a wicked look about it. Then I went to my glass, and as sure as anything, I was pale and had black rings under my eyes. Well, the up-

shot of it was that I came to the conclusion there was no use sacrificing my health and putting all the neighbours against me for the sake of a rotten language. I hid away the *Educators* there and then, for I meant to stop the model drawing too, as I saw quite well it would only lead to worse disputes when I came to study the nude, and sent out the servant for a *Family Herald Supplement*, and the peace of mind I had was wonderful.'

After another interval, in which Mrs Scamler proved herself to be so capable and resolute a trencherwoman, that she had finished her supper before her companion was half done, the story of Mr Gurdon was continued.

'But you mustn't imagine I went to their Dorcas meetings,' said Mrs Scamler, laying her left hand on the table and pointing at nothing with her forefinger. 'I said to myself, "Thus far and no further. You gave up French and model drawing to oblige your neighbours; but, mark me, Mrs Scamler, you keep yourself to yourself, pay your rent and taxes, give twenty pounds a year to the poor,

visit a little without becoming too intimate, and you'll be happy and contented." But I wasn't happy and contented, for I had nothing to do. I didn't need to work for a living, which might have been better for me. A greengrocer's now, or stationery and toys, I could have done ; and it might, I say, have been better ; but there I was, free and independent, with a vote at school board and county council elections, and so, my dear, I made up my mind to marry again. Oh ! I was very cautious. I formed a plan—you'll never guess the plan I formed.'

The young lady was sure she couldn't.

'I advertised in two London papers for a board-and-lodger,' said Mrs Scamler radiantly, as if she were the first widow in the world who had ever thought of such a thing. 'One was for a bachelor and the other was for a widower. I remember the very words of them, for I gave them much thought, and they occupied me agreeably for two or three days during the time I used to spend on my French and model drawing. The bachelor one was :—"Pleasant home

for young gentleman ; twenty-five to thirty. Short distance from Virginia Water. Widow lady of independent means. Apply Mrs S., Viewfield, Nettleby-Kingscroft, Bucks." I thought, you see, that I might prefer somebody ten years younger than myself for a change. I had married Mr Scamler for a comfortable home, you know, and I saw no reason why I shouldn't, if I chose, please my eye though I broke my heart, as they say. And this was the widower one:—"Widower can have a comfortable home in house of widow of independent means. Apply Mrs S., Viewfield, Nettleby-Kingscroft, Bucks. Reading-room, library, chess club, fishing club, etc." Very artful, both of them, weren't they? I put the widower one in a Tory paper and the bachelor one in a Radical, so that they mightn't clash. That very afternoon—I shall laugh on my death-bed when I think of it—you would have thought there was a race meeting at Nettleby-Kingscroft. They came on their feet, they came in cabs, they came on horse-back, some of them, right on from 2 P.M.

till nearly midnight. I had three bottles of port and four of sherry, and a pound cake and a tin of biscuits, but what was that among a crowd of majors, captains, ex-M.P.'s, lawyers, bankers, doctors, parsons, most of them from London, and seven of them borrowed half-crowns. By five o'clock I had beer and bread and cheese set out in every room in the house except my own, and men smoking pipes and cigars and chaffing each other; but they were very solemn to me, and asked me what I meant by such an advertisement, and what were my means any way—a paltry two hundred a year (they knew it all from the publican)—I ought to be ashamed of myself, they said, and they wouldn't have me though I was to die the day after; but that was well on in the night when they were all tipsy. At first they were very civil, and told me all about themselves, one after the other, and never said a word about board and lodging, but would I have them, yes or no, as they were in a hurry, and had expectations, and would settle another two

hundred, and one of them—I forgot—in the afternoon, with a squint and a sausage nose, had a most important engagement in Boulogne that very night, would I get fifty pounds and come away at once; and when I wouldn't he ran off damning and slamming the door. But at last a man with a laughing face and a shabby coat, seeing me like to cry with vexation, says, pulling the Tory and Radical papers out of his pocket, "Madam, you see these advertisements—widow of independent means"—very emphatical—"wants both a young gentleman and a widower. Every one of us has seen both these papers, and we know, madam, that it's a husband you want, bless your simple little heart. And we jump into a train, and we call at the public-house, and find out what you are, and look daggers and run over each other on the road, and half the blacklegs and adventurers in London are come or coming, ma'am." And I was in such a taking! And the crowd outside! Boys and men; and all the women made errands past my house. So I just shut myself up in

my room, and sent my maid for the constable and it took him half an hour to clear out the last of them. In the morning two of them were found asleep in the lane; and the tumblers and glasses they broke, and a mirror, and the carpets and cushions and table covers all dribbled and stained and singed with vestas and cigars like sack-cloth and ashes—it cost me ten pounds besides the wine and beer and bread and cheese. But next morning I did laugh; I laughed for a week, and I always laugh when I think of it.'

At this point in her story the laughter which had been flooding Mrs Scamler's voice for some time gurgled out in a most delightful stream, and set her young companion off too; and they laughed together very heartily.

'And do you know it wasn't done,' continued Mrs Scamler, when her laughter had subsided. 'Men called for two or three days after, but I didn't let them in except one that came all the way from York with his last shilling in his pocket and his last

cough in his lungs you would have said. I put him in the kitchen, and he fell asleep at the fire, and snored and coughed all evening; and when my maid poked him up with the broom he only muttered, "It was a very pleasant, comfortable home; odd, though, to sleep at the kitchen fire; he would have liked a bedroom to himself." The poor creature thought I kept a free hospital for inscrutables. I sent him back next day, and a lawyer wrote me for twenty pounds; but I took no notice of it. And the letters I got with every post for a fortnight! Threatening, imploring, cudgelling—such passionate letters, too! With bits of Shakespeare and Byron, My Lady and My Queen, Some Day, I know not when or how, and Love me Little Love me Long. And they had all made a vow when they were boys to marry a widow of independent means. Half of them gave me just two days to answer. They had a revolver, and would hold it at their temples for forty-eight hours—with their elbows on the mantelpiece, doubtless, for nobody *could* keep the position with-

out *some* support—and if no answer came my blood will be on your head. But I had seen the kind of gentleman and it didn't trouble me. Well, my dear, I became a terror to the village. People got out of my way in the street. The butcher's, the chemist's, and the schoolmaster's wife—wives, I mean (and yet they might as well be one woman for their brains are all cut to the same shape, and the butcher and the chemist and the schoolmaster wouldn't much mind, I think)—held me up as an example of the dreadful effect of the French language, and frightened their children with Mrs Scamler. Everybody eyed me ; I saw them ; and I believe they would have burned me alive if they could. But to, confess the truth, I rather liked it, and next month I put in an advertisement again—a horse of quite another colour, although why an advertisement should be called a horse I can't make out, or anything else, not the advertisement but the horse. I remember it quite well, for it took me a whole day to compose it, and it went :—“ Single gentleman can

have board and lodging in a villa in one of the most delightful parts of England, within easy distance of London. Very moderate to a permanency. Apply S., office of this paper.' Three out of the applications pleased me, and the first I wrote to was Mr Gurdon, so I didn't see the other two. I was at the window when he came in at the garden gate, and I thought I had never seen such a nice-looking, middle-aged gentleman before, and not very middle-aged either. Not too tall, and not too short—a fine, fresh, stout, clean-looking, well-set-up man in his prime; and I tell you I thought to myself "this is the very man for a decent widow to marry." So I went and lay down on the couch in the drawing-room with a shawl round my shoulders. I didn't want to seem too well and hearty you know, for they say men like women to be just a little delicate—which, goodness knows, I never was, and can't understand it. And the first words he says after bidding me good-day, quite cheerful like, but slow and em-

phatical, "Madam, I am a mahoganist." Don't you know? Neither did I then. It means a woman-hater.'

'Oh! misogynist,' said the young lady.

'Yes, misogynist. Misogynier, misogynist. But perhaps it is not an adjective—if so, incomparable. I always have it wrong. Misogynist, mahoganist—it got mixed up in my mind with Mahomet—which I can't make out as he wasn't one—and a side-board, very big and gloomy that used to sit in my father's dining-room. But its root's guinea, a woman. Misogynist. I understand it quite well, my dear, although I make a mistake sometimes in pronunciation, having got all my learning without a master. "Madam," he says, "I am a mahoganist." "Indeed, sir," I said, thinking it was his business. "Would you go into the city every day, then?" "No, madam," he said, rather wondering at me, "I would not go into the city." Then I guessed it was his religion, and told him there was none of them in the village. "Oh," he cries, still wondering at me. Seeing I was wrong

again, and not to be beaten, I asked him if he suffered much, and there was a very good doctor in the neighbourhood. Then he burst out laughing, and begged my pardon, and told me that mahoganist meant a woman-hater. I thought to myself "maybe you do," but I said nothing, and we made a bargain. But the rules that he laid down were dreadful. He wasn't to see me except once a week, when—'

'Now, then, ladies,' said the head waiter shrilly, but with great self-possession, being again master of his subject, 'five minutes to twelve.'

'Goodness gracious me, Mr Waiter,' cried Mrs Scamler, 'is it that time already? And does Mr Gurdon come here every day?'

'He never was here before, ma'am,' replied the head waiter hesitatingly, and with a half turn towards his assistant.

'No, 'e never was 'ere before,' said the assistant. 'But 'e may come back again.'

'By-the-bye,' said the young lady, 'you said that these gentlemen went away to—'

gether, and that they had been dining with somebody.'

'Yes, ma'am ; with Mr Ware.'

'Do you know where Mr Ware lives?'

'No, ma'am ; but 'e's—per'aps 'e's comin' downstairs now. Guild o' Prosemen to-night, an' 'e's a Prosemen, 'e is.'

But only four Prosemen had remained till closing time. Mr Ware, they told the assistant waiter, who intercepted them on their way out, had left with Mr Rorison shortly after Earl Lavender and Lord Brumm. The four Prosemen, on learning that two ladies wanted Mr Ware's address, were sorry they didn't know it ; they thought it was in the Temple.

'To-morrow or next day,' said the effusive and agile, but always apologetic, assistant, returning to the ladies who had risen, and were quite ready to go, 'Mr Ware is sure to dine 'ere, ladies, on a steak or a chop. Three or four times a week 'e comes, which don't mean that 'e lives in Islington or Nottin-gill, ma'am, although the twins do live in Pentonville.'

'Well, now, Mr Waiter — Mr Waiter, junior,' said Mrs Scamler, touching one of the buttons of the assistant's coat with her magic eye-glasses delicately, so as not to harm him, 'when Mr Ware comes, will you tell him that two ladies would like to see him about the gentlemen who dined with him to-day? He won't have forgotten.'

'That 'e won't, ma'am; and neither will the twins.'

'And here,' said Mrs Scamler, taking a somewhat battered, silver-filigree card-case and a gold pencil from a very capacious pocket, 'is my address: "Mrs Scamler, Pilkington's Private Hotel, Guelph Crescent, W.C." But if the two gentlemen return, you mustn't on any account tell them that we were here,' continued Mrs Scamler, when she had written the address. 'Find out where they're living — they must be living somewhere. In fact, follow them, and don't lose sight of them until you have sent for us and we have come to take charge of them.'

'Impossible, ma'am,' said the head waiter,

with some asperity. 'His duties are here; he ain't a detective.'

'If I thought,' said Mrs Scamler, with amazing force, 'if I thought he was a detective, I would denounce him. Detectives—my dear, I shall tell you of a detective; it belongs to what I was saying about Mr Gurdon. Then, perhaps, Mr Waiter, since the young man's duties are so onerous,' continued Mrs Scamler, winningly, 'you could undertake it yourself. Mr Waiter, junior, does all the work, and your position being ornamental, and honourable too—no doubt of it, sir—not to say honorary, and quite as onerous when properly understood, you wouldn't, I should think, be greatly missed.'

A reply embodying the full strength and weight of the ponderous head's astonishment and indignation would have been beyond the scope of his vocabulary and the pitch of his voice. Happily he was spared the necessity of attempting the impossible by the entrance of the proprietor, who superintended in person the shutting up of the 'Cap-and-Bells.'

‘Oh!’ exclaimed Mrs Scamler, perceiving that this was a person in authority, ‘I have just been asking your waiters, who are very attentive and obliging, and if they should ever want a character I shall be very glad, to do me a favour, but they are not inclined to help me. I have been proposing that the young man—I should prefer the young man, but the old one would do—to—well, you see, it would have to be some way like this. He could have a telegram ready written—and stamped—in his pocket. “Scamler, Pilkington’s, Guelph Crescent, W.C.”—one, two, three, four, five—“found sixty-three Appleby Street, Pilkington Square, Hampstead, N.”—six, seven, eight, nine, ten, eleven, twelve, thirteen, fourteen: sevenpence that would be, and as long an address as he would be likely to have to wire, unless there were three figures, or it was N.W.—but perhaps that’s only one, W. or N.W.—I never knew—we could make it eightpence. He could give it to a policeman to take to the nearest telegraph office without taking his eye off the door of the house for a single instant, and

if they left before we arrived, then he would follow them, and leave word—he would need several telegrams—'

Here Mrs Scamler's plan became so involved that she was brought to a standstill; and the proprietor, who had kept his countenance wonderfully, asked her, without making the slightest reference to her proposal, and in a very affable manner, if she would walk or take a cab home.

'Oh, yes, certainly, please,' said Mrs Scamler, by which she was understood to assent to the latter alternative.

The young lady, who had never before been so amazed at, amused by, and ashamed for a member of her own sex, or of the other for that matter, in the whole twenty years of her life, and who had been quite unable to get a word in edgeways since they rose to go, now held out her hand to Mrs Scamler to say good-night.

'Oh, no, not yet,' said the loquacious widow. 'We must go together, and I shall drop you at your address. Consider, my dear. We must arrange to see each other

to-morrow. I must tell you about Mr Gurdon, and you must tell me about your gentleman, and how we both knew to come to the "Cap-and-Bells" for them. Why, its the most wonderful thing in the world! And we must arrange our future proceedings. Good-night, Mr Waiter; good-night, Mr Junior. And Mr Proprietor, it would perhaps be better, when these two gentlemen come, to arrest them. You could easily find some excuse. It would do quite well, wouldn't it, to accuse them of passing false coin? What's your address, my dear?'

'Great British Hotel,' said the young lady.

'We want to go,' said Mrs Scamler, for by this time they had reached the door of the tavern, and a cab was waiting; 'we want to go to Pilkington's, Guelph Crescent, and the Great British Hotel, and you're to go to the nearest first.'

When they had entered the cab, Mrs Scamler thrust her head out of the window and waved her hand to the proprietor.

‘Or the junior could put spoons in their top-coat pockets,’ she cried. ‘Or simply—’ but the noise of the wheels drowned her last suggestion.

CHAPTER V

HOW THEY SUPPED IN PICCADILLY CIRCUS

NOR much time is spent in driving from Fleet Street to Piccadilly Circus even at eleven o'clock at night, if you get out of the crowded Strand at once and go by the Embankment, as the cabman did who drove Earl Lavender and Lord Brumm after their first and triumphant demonstration of the law of the survival of the fittest in the 'Cap-and-Bells.' Short as was the journey, however, before they had gone half-way, Lord Brumm had recovered from the state of collapse to which the arbitrary conduct of his companion had reduced him. To thrust his umbrella through the valve in the top of the cab, and shout—'Stop! stop!'

in a frenzied manner was the first use to which he put his restored faculties.

‘What is it?’ asked Earl Lavender.

‘Yes, sir?’ queried the cabman hoarsely.

‘I want to get out,’ replied Lord Brumm to the cabman. ‘We *must* get out,’ he declared hotly to Earl Lavender. ‘And apologise — apologise to a cabman! Oh, the row there’ll be! But if we get out at once and say we’ve just discovered we’ve no money, we may get over it.’

As he said this Lord Brumm burst open the door in eager haste; but Earl Lavender, pulling him back by the coat-tails, and bidding the driver go on, proceeded to reason with his henchman.

‘I am disappointed, good Brumm,’ he said, ‘that you should continue to doubt the power of Evolution after what you have seen to-night.

‘I don’t doubt it,’ said Brumm, in a harassed way. ‘I don’t doubt it for one moment, when there’s a necessity in the case, like food and drink. But we could have walked, you see; and I’ll be hanged

if I can understand how it concerns Evolution to get us out of a mere scrape.'

'Out of all kinds of scrapes, my dear Brumm, Evolution has the power to deliver us. There is no conceivable scrape which is not a link in the great chain—in Chance, which is the empirical name for Evolution, and bears the same relation to it that alchemy bears to chemistry, and astrology to astronomy. And the last little scrape of all, death, is simply the charming means Evolution takes to get us out of the great big scrape, life. You will never be happy, my dear friend, until you submit to the Evolutionary will. If it were not so amusing, nothing would be more insufferable than the unanimity and persistency with which all men and kindreds and nations shout up into space, "What a scrape we're in!" It is the first thing the child says in its inarticulate way with the first breath of air it is able to employ. "Oh, what a scrape to be sure!" And it is the last thing the man feels on his death-bed. And you will find that all

the books and newspapers and music in the world are only expositions and sermons and fugues and variations on the one theme. "Oh, what a scrape!" Now, it is my mission to change the world's tune. I mean to teach it that scrape, luck, chance, is law, is Evolution, is the soul of the universe; and having brought man's will into accord with the Evolutionary will, in a very short time it will come about that children will laugh with their first breath, as much as to say, "What a delightful thing it is to come into the world." And on their death-beds men will cry, "How refreshing and noble it is to pass away," while all the books and newspapers and music of the world will cease to be a mere complaint, will cease—together, the books and newspapers, perhaps, and only glad music remain. And this change we are to bring about, good Brumm, by the simple method which we have inaugurated to-night.'

Lord Brumm did not catch the whole of this harangue, and what he did hear seemed to him nonsense; but Earl

Lavender's assured tone, and the radiant confidence of his expression, quieted his fears once more, much to his own amazement; and when they drew up on the north side of Piccadilly Circus, opposite the entrance to the Café Benvenuto, he stepped out of the cab, feeling as little anxiety as Earl Lavender himself about the payment of the fare.'

'I think we should go in here,' he said in a thoroughly Evolutionary style, which delighted his companion. 'It's nearly three hours since we ate anything.'

'An admirable proposal,' assented Earl Lavender.

Having told the cabman to wait, they entered the Grecian saloon of the Café Benvenuto and sat down at a table. Lord Brumm felt some trepidation when he found himself in a beautiful white temple in the midst of a small crowd of men and women, mostly in evening dress, and saw, or thought he saw, 'ready money and plenty of it while it lasts' in the cut of their clothes and the expression of their faces. His

sudden Evolutionary heat began to cool, and he suggested in an undertone that they should content themselves with a modest snack. But Earl Lavender, having ordered the 'Theatre Supper' at five shillings a head, reproached his henchman for his inconstancy, and assured him that Evolution would help only those who reposed unwavering faith in its power and gave it continual exercise in vindicating their fitness.

'Nothing grieves Evolution more, my dear Brumm,' he said, 'than half belief. We must not proceed on the assumption that it is easier for Evolution to provide the cost of a dish of macaroni than that of a supper of four courses. Evolution is on its trial, and will display its power cheerfully on our behalf in any matter and to any extent, or I am very much mistaken. Above all, good Brumm, be happy and regardless of expense, for to be worried and economical ill becomes the apostles of that power which wasted countless ages in fashioning indolently one little world.'

'Well, well,' said Lord Brumm rest-

lessly, 'Sufficient unto the day is the Evilution thereof. We shall have one good supper though we sleep in prison for it.'

'There is no chance of that,' said Earl Lavender. 'We shall sleep to-night in as good beds as there are in London. But you mustn't pun, Brumm, Puns are produced only in vacant minds. Keep high thoughts and visions of delightful things before you and you won't pun.'

'I seldom do,' retorted Lord Brumm. 'That one slipped out before I noticed. Evolution must have sent it.'

'As a punishment then,' rejoined Earl Lavender.

'Oh, oh!' exclaimed Lord Brumm.

'What is it?'

'Pun-ishment, the most ancient pun in the language.'

'It is the observer of the pun that makes it, my dear Brumm. Of course, when the word is distorted, as in Evil-ution, the most preoccupied notice it, but in this instance which you try to fasten upon me the crime is yours. There is nothing more contrary to

the Evolutionary will than puns. Bloodshed and desolation follow in their wake. Their English heyday, which was in the reign of James I., caused the great civil war; in France they flourished most rankly under Louis XV., and produced the French Revolution. I have considered puns, and apart altogether from their hateful effect, as shown in history, it is certain that they are quite unevolutionary, because I, the fittest of men, am unable to make them. You will consult your own welfare, and that of the nation, Brougham, by refraining in future.'

'Not the least agreeable feature of the "Theatre Supper" at the Café Benvenuto,' continued Earl Lavender as the waiter brought the first dish, 'seems to be the expedition with which it is served.'

'Yes,' said Lord Brumm; 'you see, all these people must have supper before twelve o'clock. Dinners and luncheons in foreign cockney restaurants are often very carelessly served—with Evolutionary indolence, in fact, but when they are tied to time these moosoos can skip.'

U O P M

! 'I am delighted to find you applying the Evolutionary idea for yourself, good Brumm, even although your interpretation is mistaken, for I can assure you there is nothing Evolutionary in the tardy service of a dinner. There are times and seasons when Evolution is eager in its haste, and it seems to me that here and now a most signal illustration is provided of its passionate desire to vindicate my fitness.'

'What do you mean?' asked Lord Brumm. 'Everybody else is being attended to as promptly as you.'

'You are wide of the mark, Brumm,' replied Earl Lavender. 'Unless my wits have deserted me entirely, Evolution has brought together on the very first day of the evolutionary epoch the fittest man and the fittest woman. At the second table on my left there sits alone a female figure of matchless grace and majesty. She is veiled, only her chin and mouth being visible; but if I have any intuition at all, her face is the most beautiful ever seen, and she is the sweetest and strongest among the daughters of men.'

She is veiled as a sign that I must not claim her yet, but we shall see her again, or it may be that she herself will lay claim to me, and that to-night.'

'Evolution forbid!' exclaimed Lord Brumm.

'Why?' queried Earl Lavender.

'Because I hate women.'

'Nothing could be more unevolutionary,' said Earl Lavender gravely. 'There is some mystery here; you have not the temperament of a woman-hater. What do you mean?'

'I mean what I say. Women are by nature unjust, unfaithful, hard-hearted, wrong-headed, perverse, hypocritical, unintelligent, uninteresting, uncompanionable—in every respect inferior to men, and unchangeable in their inferiority.'

'Here's an indictment!' said Earl Lavender, laughing.

'And,' continued Lord Brumm, rejoicing in his new-found energy, 'if there were any truth in this Evolutionary nonsense—'

'Pause there,' said Earl Lavender at once,

in a low voice, that trembled with fury. 'Withdraw and apologise. It is not from you that I shall hear Evolution slighted. Apologise.'

'But, my lord—' began Lord Brumm, paling a little.

'No excuse, no explanation! Apologise. You have thrown in your lot with me, and however accidental your aspersion of Evolution may have been, I require an instant apology. Apologise.'

'This is just a little too much,' said Lord Brumm testily.

'Very well, sir,' rejoined Earl Lavender, rising and seizing his hat, 'I go. A renegade already! But I am glad that your unfitness has been proved before I had committed myself further in your company.'

'Stop!' cried Lord Brumm, quaking at the idea of being left alone in his penniless plight to face the waiter and the cabman. 'I am very sorry. I beg your pardon. I beg Evolution's pardon.'

'And will never offend again?' said Earl Lavender, taking off his hat.

‘And will never offend again,’ repeated Lord Brumm.

‘Then,’ said Earl Lavender, resuming his seat, ‘the circumstance is forgiven and forgotten. Pursue,’ he continued, with an immediate and full return of his gracious manner, ‘pursue the discussion.’

‘Well, my lord,’ rejoined Lord Brumm, nothing loth, for he was now on his own subject, and was glad to forget his disagreement with Earl Lavender, ‘it seems to me that, woman being undoubtedly a most inferior creature, Evolution—with all due reverence—should have by this time provided some other means for the continuance of the race, and should have allowed man, the fittest, to survive alone.’

‘Your premises granted,’ replied Earl Lavender, ‘you do indeed deal a telling blow at Evolution. But I cannot believe you are in earnest in asserting the inferiority of woman; she is different from man, but not inferior. The fact that woman has survived, and is now triumphing over the oppression and slavery of which she was so long the

patient victim, is, in my eyes, not only a proof of her fitness, but a proof of the truth of Evolution.'

'My lord, I have been married twice,' said Lord Brumm solemnly.

'That is your mystery, is it! You'll be married a third time, man, before you know where you are.' At which assurance Lord Brumm blushed scarlet, and looked very uneasy. 'And you are generalising from an experience of only two women! Come, good Brumm, you must revise all your opinions from your new point of view.'

'Not from my own experience alone,' argued Lord Brumm; 'from biography, history and fiction.'

'All three admirable on any established basis, but impossible authorities in the discussion of Evolution, my best of Brumms; because it is the purpose of Evolution to re-write everything. Understand me. You might as well admit the doctrine of Pythagoras concerning the soul and Mohammed's idea of heaven as necessary data for the discussion of an Eight Hours Bill, as refer to

any existing literature, system or creed in arguing the question of Evolution. The opinions of all writers are based hitherto on their own experience and the experience of other writers. Consider it very carefully. In the whole history of the world, we have had recorded hitherto only the experience and opinions of a few hundred people—of a few hundred out of thousands of millions, and all of them disposed more or less by education to ratify the conclusions of their predecessors.

‘All existing literature, philosophy and religion are as relevant to the needs of mankind as the opinion regarding opium of the Yogi, who lives on the top of Mount Everest, would be to the subject of agricultural depression in England. Under the Evolutionary system, experience and opinion must be gathered from the entire world, and before a harvest sufficient to make one little chapter of the Evolutionary Bible can be reaped, many decades must pass, many hundreds of years perhaps; for not until Evolution has been universally accepted, can we have a

universally accepted opinion on any subject, even the simplest, such as the roasting of eggs. Thus, you see, Evolution overthrows all systems, all creeds, and cancels all literature. But in this transition period, this night-time of history, Evolution has not been unmindful of the world's wants. I, the fittest human being that ever walked beneath the moon, have been sent into the world, furnished with unerring intuition, as a guide to the people, and have to-night begun my apostolate triumphantly, as you yourself have witnessed.'

During this deliverance Earl Lavender had kept his eye fixed on the Veiled Lady, and in his own mind, although his words were heard only by Lord Brumm, she was his true audience. As a matter of fact, he had no listener at all, for Lord Brumm's attention was so engrossed by the manœuvres of their waiter, that Earl Lavender's words fell on his hearing like water through a sieve.

The rapidly served supper had been as rapidly disposed of during the quarrel and discussion; and the waiter, a baboon-faced

person of dubious nationality, now moved stealthily about the table at which Earl Lavender and Lord Brumm sat. He had his bill-book in his hand, with the bill made out, and tapped it expressively with his pencil every few instants. He frowned, muttered, and gnashed his teeth ; or charged the table, bill in hand, only to relent and circle his prey as if he had not yet hypnotised them to the paying point. Lord Brumm had never seen an uglier waiter, or one of stranger behaviour. He felt quite faint when he thought of what would happen on the presentation of the bill ; but having that species of courage which faces the worst as soon as it is inevitable, he suggested at the pause in Earl Lavender's remarks that it was time to go.

The waiter, divining the purport of Lord Brumm's words, struck in at once with his bill.

Earl Lavender read it aloud. 'Two suppers, ten shillings. Wine, eleven shillings. A guinea.' He then looked up at the waiter and smiled.

'I vait,' said the waiter fiercely. 'It is now quarter of tvelfe. Vun, dwo, oader supper, not yet avhile, I vait, regard.'

'Are you French?' asked Earl Lavender, amused by this specimen of foreign-waiter's English—a *patois* of which he had had but little experience, but by which even the most experienced can seldom distinguish nationality. Many of the foreign waiters in London pick up their English chiefly in the society of each other: French, German, Italian and Swiss, they have among them produced a syntax, vocabulary and pronunciation consisting almost exclusively of mistakes, which bear the impress of the genius of one or other, and sometimes of all, of their native tongues.

'Are you French?' asked Earl Lavender, much interested in the baboon-like waiter and his hybrid speech.

'That makes nothing,' replied the waiter more fiercely than before. 'Ze tabble, I vait, regard.'

Following with his eyes the gesture which accompanied 'regard,' Earl Lavender per-

ceived that the waiter meant him to take note of the stream of people who were entering the room hurriedly and filling up every seat.

‘Oh!’ he said, ‘I understand. You wish us to give place to others. And indeed, it is time we did, for it may require several nights of very brisk custom to repay you the price of our supper.’

‘Ze bill, sir,’ said the waiter, tapping with his pencil.

‘Have you not understood?’ asked Earl Lavender in mild astonishment. ‘You are to pay the bill out of your own pocket since Evolution has seen fit to provide no other means.’

‘*Sacré!*’ cried the waiter. ‘‘Afe you ze bayment made, pardon, quick, vun, dwo, oader supper. ‘Immel! ze time vly, beoble vait, I vait, ze tabble, vill you den yourself dwo oader suppers take twice? heh! heh!’

‘Explain to him, Brumm,’ said Earl Lavender, rising.

‘We have no money, waiter,’ said Lord Brumm, who was ghastly pale, and

covered with perspiration. 'Understand? We—have—no—money.'

'Vat you say? Mein Gott!' shrieked the waiter, drawing all eyes on himself. 'You eat, you drink, you talk, and you zit, zit, zit, and go not away upon nothing I bresent, and 'afe no monney! Ach! roppers! *Bonne mère!* twenty-vun shilling lost dead, and ze provitable tip, tip, tip. Jean'—this to the commissionaire, a burly young Soudanese veteran who had just entered—'vetch ze boleece.'

'Stop!' said the superintendent of the room, interfering unwillingly, and only at the last moment, between the waiter and his prey. 'Gentlemen, what is the matter?'

Instead of replying immediately, Earl Lavender motioned the commissionaire and the waiter, who intercepted his view, to stand aside. This they did mechanically; whereupon Earl Lavender delivered a short address sitting in his chair, and seen by everybody in the room, those nearest him remaining seated, while the others arranged themselves

gallery-wise, standing up, according to distance, on the floor or the chairs.

‘Ladies and gentlemen,’ said Earl Lavender in his clear, musical voice, ‘the ready inclination you show to attend to my message is very gratifying, but that hardly decreases the difficulty I find in making myself understood, for even my disciple here, Lord Brumm, fails, except in snatches, to grasp my meaning. Unaccustomed, as I imagine you all are, with one transcendent exception, to any effort of real thought, I cannot expect to find you more receptive than my last audience, which consisted of authors—men in the habit of at least trying to think. I may, however, remind you that in certain spheres of knowledge Evolution has already been recognised and welcomed as an iconoclast. This you must all have gathered from the newspapers and ordinary conversation, as I myself have done. It has remained for me, however, to discover and teach Evolution as a religion which shall remould all our ideas, all our customs, all our habits ; and you will at once understand that a better missionary could not have been

chosen when I inform you that I am the fittest of human beings. Instead of writing a book, or delivering a series of lectures in St James's Hall, I have adopted, as in Evolution bound, a new method of promulgating the new system. In my own person and that of Lord Brumm I am illustrating the doctrine of the survival of the fittest. Without money we enter a restaurant, and eat and drink of the best, trusting to Evolution to defray the expense. No propaganda could be simpler or more efficacious. Twice to-night Evolution has vindicated our fitness, providing in the 'Cap-and-Bells' the price of steaks and ale and of a magnum of Mumm. I have perfect confidence that a third miracle will now be performed; for these are Evolutionary miracles, ladies and gentlemen, and the only kind possible in the nineteenth century.'

The distinct, authoritative utterance, and the calm, smiling face of Earl Lavender produced such an effect that for a few seconds after he had concluded perfect silence reigned. Then laughter rose and

swelled and filled the room ; people began to chatter, and many plied their knives and forks again, although still keeping a watchful eye on the scene in progress.

‘Boleece!’ cried the baboon-faced waiter, blue with anger. ‘You lose me my situation. You no know what all you do. But you s’all soof-soof-soofer. You s’all in ze mill wheel hum for t’ree six weeks like ze busy leetle basso in ze song, and ’afe a deal of ze blank to sleebe, heh! heh!’

The superintendent, perplexed but self-possessed, bidding the waiter be quiet, appealed to Lord Brumm.

‘The joke has gone far enough,’ he said. ‘Your friend is evidently prepared to carry it on, but I think you hardly seem to be of his mind in the matter.’

‘We have no money,’ said the miserable Brumm inertly.

‘I’ll take your watches, then,’ said the superintendent.

Lord Brumm shook his head and threw open his coat.

‘Well,’ said the superintendent, feeling

that they were not common sharpers, 'if you will leave your names and addresses, and an acknowledgment of the debt, you may go.'

'To our names,' said Earl Lavender, pleasantly, 'you are welcome. I am the Earl of Lavender, and this is Lord Brumm. And also to our address, which, in the meantime, is London. But from to-night forward we shall never pay for anything. In the economic, as in all spheres, Evolution spells change.'

The superintendent looked carefully at the nails of his own right hand, then he nodded to the Soudanese veteran. There was again silence in the room, and all eyes were fixed on Earl Lavender. But just as the commissioner turned towards the door, the Veiled Lady rose and advanced to the table at which Earl Lavender sat.

'Wait a little,' she said in a harp-like voice, calling after the commissioner, who came back at once. 'How much is it?' she asked of the superintendent.

The superintendent pointed to the bill.

‘One pound one,’ she said, stooping over the table and opening her purse.

The baboon-faced waiter immediately held out his hand, and the Veiled Lady placed in it a sovereign and half-a-crown.

‘I zank you,’ he said, pocketing the coins greedily, and without making that feeble appearance of searching for change, the usual ceremony accompanying the acceptance of a tip which is not paid separately. ‘I zank you, but I zink I would ’afe him in ze mill wheel much more hum.’

When the bill was paid, Earl Lavender rose and made a deep bow to the Veiled Lady, who acknowledged it with a slight inclination. He then offered her his arm, which, after a moment’s hesitation, she took. He conducted her to the door of the saloon, and there he faced the people again.

‘Ladies and gentlemen,’ he said, ‘when I consider the tremendous issues involved in the episode you have witnessed to-night, I confess that, in spite of my desire to take things as they come, I am amazed at your callousness. Had I risen in a crowded meet-

ing of Parliament and introduced a bill for the compulsory emigration of the inhabitants of Great Britain, and the peopling of Scotland and England with Hibernian and American-Irish, my reception would have been of a very warm nature. And yet, I assure you, what you have heard and seen in this place to-night, is the beginning of a change in polity, creed and conduct, to which the racial rearrangement I have suggested would be but as a pyrotechnic display at Sydenham to the fires of Doomsday. It fills me indeed with consternation to see you sitting here eating and drinking, laughing and talking, thoughtless and secure at the very moment when a lever has been put to the world which shall shift its orbit. Not that I would have you gloomy; not that I would have you what is called serious: seriousness, as it is commonly understood, is no part of the radiant Evolutionary life; but I should like to see you interested and excited. Doubtless you have often said to yourselves,—“We recognise the change going on about us: Society is being re-edified on a

new plan?" But I tell you dilapidation did not cease with the walls, and while you are busy with your new social structure, a mine is laid under the ancient foundations on which you build. Be warned in time; leave your patchwork and start afresh. You are erecting your new marble on an old groundwork of brick. Get down to the solid rock once more, I beseech you. Take example by me. Not in parliaments, or cathedrals, or colleges, but in taverns and restaurants is the new doctrine preached; and its veracity is attested not by banners and trumpets and embattled hosts, but by a simple miracle which lay to my hand—to wit, the being publicly provided for at the expense of others—that is, by Evolution. Although I bid you take example by me, I do not ask for slavish imitation. That would be impossible were you to attempt it, for Evolution permits the course I follow only to the fittest of mortals and his chosen disciple. But I say again, take example by me. Although you cannot be the fittest, you may be fit enough. Make clean sheets

of your minds; and in place of all old ideas inscribe this alone,—“The fit shall survive, and Earl Lavender is the fittest.” You may also, in many ways, invite Evolution to vindicate your fitness. Those of you who are wealthy, might easily bestow your goods upon the poor, and begin life anew. Those of you who have no means, but whose ambition it is to be rich, could abandon that ambition at once, and spend the remainder of your days in beggary, or in some precarious occupation such as that of vending bootlaces and collar studs in Fleet Street and the Strand. You see, with a little ingenuity, you could devise many means of challenging Evolution. Above all, be thoughtful, be cheerful, be serene. Good-night.’

He had his hand on the door when he suddenly remembered the lady.

‘I forgot to invite your attention,’ he said, again addressing his silent and astounded audience, ‘to the most signal testimony to the truth of my mission. My mission is twofold; to be the first and greatest exemplar of the

Evolutionary life, and to find and mate with the fittest woman. On this the very first day of the Evolutionary era my triumph is complete. I have lived the Evolutionary life without a hitch, and have found before the new era is many hours old the woman whom Evolution appoints. I may, indeed, without vanity, ask you to rejoice with me, and command you in the name of Evolution to become my disciples on the instant. Fully persuaded that you are all convinced of the truth of my mission, I invite you to signify your conversion by giving three cheers for Earl Lavender. Lord Brumm will lead the cheering.'

'Lord Brumm will be damned first,' said that wretched man under his breath.

But his services were not required. Many of those in the room were actors and music-hall artistes. They had all doubtless formed their own opinions as to the condition of Earl Lavender's wits; but recognising that he was dowered with a full share of the gifts and graces which they themselves most wished to possess, they burst into a shout of genuine

admiration, again and again repeated and joined in by almost everybody in the room.

Earl Lavender, having bowed his acknowledgments, left the café with the lady on his arm, and followed by Lord Brumm, the extent of whose disgust was to be measured only by the extent of his astonishment.

CHAPTER VI

A SOMEWHAT SURPRISING CHAPTER

THE cabman was having a hot altercation with a policeman when Earl Lavender and his companions left the Café Benvenuto. An oft-renewed altercation it had been, for the cabman had repeatedly taken his stand opposite the door; whenever, indeed, the approach to the restaurant was unoccupied by arrivals or departures: only to be warned away by the watchful constable. Both his patience and the policeman's were exhausted, and the latter was declaring that he believed the cabman had no engagement at all at the very moment his fare reappeared.

'Here; take my number,' cried the cabman triumphantly to his tormentor; 'Fifteen million three hundred and thirty-nine thou-

sand five hundred and sixty-two and a half. I got no fare, haven't I? Oh, no; I'm one o' these wealthy private cabs that sneaks a livin' from the miserable toffs wot runs the 'ansoms. D'ye see my armorial bearin's, stoopid? Can't yer read Latin? *Vidget incendiary Virtus* and a Venux above a B. This yer's Lord Basinghoume's cab, and pretty sweetly I pay for it, I can tell you.'

The policeman grinned but made no reply.

'Where to, sir?' asked the cabman.

The Veiled Lady, who sat between Earl Lavender and Lord Brumm, replied,—

'Trallidge's Hotel.'

'Move on there,' shouted the policeman, adding in an aside to the Soudanese commissioner, 'incendiary vegetable or whatever you call yourself.'

Rookwood Square, one side of which is occupied by Trallidge's is not far from Piccadilly Circus, and in less than five minutes the party arrived. The lady paid the fare, and the three entered the hotel.

In the hall Lord Brumm rebelled. He had heard of Trallidge's, and so, indeed, for the matter of that, had Earl Lavender. It had a very dubious reputation. No specific charge was ever brought against it, but ordinary people looked mighty knowing when it was mentioned.

'I'm not going to stay here,' said Lord Brumm; 'I have still some character to lose if you haven't.'

'What's the matter?' said Earl Lavender.

'How do I know?' retorted Lord Brumm; 'but you surely can't be ignorant of the ill-name this place has. We may all be arrested in the night and appear in to-morrow's evening papers among a herd of German Jews and Jewesses, needy swells and commercial travellers — "Raid on a West-end Night-house," or something of that kind.'

The Lady of the Veil, who had vanished on entering the hotel, now reappeared from the clerk's office. She overheard the last of Lord Brumm's remarks, and, raising one hand to stay Earl Lavender's answer, beckoned a stalwart porter with the other. She

then led the way to a stair which went down to the kitchen department. Earl Lavender followed closely, and so did Lord Brumm, for behind him came the stalwart porter smiling sardonically. Pursuing a passage in the sunk flat, the Lady of the Veil brought them to a second stair, very broad and well lit, at the foot of which they found themselves in a large room floored with cedar, hung with tapestry, and furnished with rugs, couches and cushions. A small fountain gurgled and lisped in a marble basin, and several doors admitted muffled sounds of music and conversation. Four men and four women, stately in figure, and with grave, pleasant faces, were the inmates of this room; they were dressed in loose flowing robes, and from the books in their hands, or laid open on the couches, it was plain that they had been reading before the new arrivals disturbed their studies. Too amazed to speak or think, Earl Lavender and Lord Brumm stared about them, while the Veiled Lady, having dismissed the porter, conversed in whispers with the occupants of

the room. Shortly the four men approached Earl Lavender and Lord Brumm, and led them towards one of the doors. Earl Lavender, submitting to the Evolutionary will, remained passive in the hands of the pair who had laid hold on him; but Lord Brumm was at first inclined to resent interference with his liberty. However, the powerful grasp which his captors laid upon him at his first struggle taught him to abandon all attempts at resistance.

They were conducted along a lofty carpeted passage to a room much larger than that they had left, which was also hung with tapestry and furnished with rugs, cushions and couches. In it a performance was going on which froze Lord Brumm with terror, and excited a very lively interest in the mind of Earl Lavender.

On the couches sat several middle-aged men and women, whose countenances, like those of the inmates of the first room, wore an agreeable expression of thoughtful gravity. These were superintending the operations of men and women of almost all ages,

who entered sometimes in pairs and sometimes in groups. There were three couples present when Earl Lavender and Lord Brumm were led in; and two of the men and one of the women were being soundly flogged by the other three. The chastisers counted the lashes aloud, and in each case twelve were administered. As soon as the punishment had been inflicted, the seeming culprits gathered their robes about them, received the whips, which were of knotted cords, from the hands of those who had wielded them, and the punishers became the punished. Then the couples, having been thus reciprocally lashed, laid their whips on one of the couches, and tripped out of the room, dancing to a measure which was clearly heard, and evidently proceeded from a band of music in a neighbouring apartment.

Having tarried in this room for a minute or two, their captors led Earl Lavender and Lord Brumm along another passage to the toilet department of the Underground City. Here they were laved in

warm water, then plunged into snow artificially prepared, and finally drenched in a shower bath of attar of roses. Robes similar to those worn by the other dwellers in the Underground World were given them, and they were taken back to the Whipping Room. Four couples were engaged in the extraordinary ceremony of this apartment when they re-entered it. As there could be no mistake about the actuality and severity of the chastisement, Lord Brumm, at the sight of two tall young women armed with whips, who rose from a couch to greet him and Earl Lavender, cried,—

‘No, no! I won’t have it, I—’

He got no further with his protest, for he was instantly gagged, his hands and feet tied, and his robe thrown from his shoulders. Then one of the young women, an athletic girl of about twenty, with a laughing face and a roguish eye, laid twelve lashes on his broad back with the heartiest goodwill.

In the meantime Earl Lavender, without waiting for instructions, bared his shoulders as he had seen the others do,

clasped his hands on his breast and stood stock-still. The second woman, who possessed great beauty, and seemed to be about twenty-five years of age, at once inflicted with sufficient vigour a dozen lashes and one to the bargain. Earl Lavender winced at the first and second lash, and at the third he moved a step forward, but he took the rest of his punishment without a motion. His fair chastiser approved of his conduct with a charming smile, and having handed him the whip, exposed her own back. Lightly Earl Lavender brought down the scourge. How could he score the soft white shoulders of this beautiful woman! But she turned to him with a mortified look, and said,—

‘You are unworthy of my friendship if you spare me. Put forth your strength, or I will leave you.’

Convinced of the lady’s sincerity, Earl Lavender then laid on lustily, and was astonished to find, when he gave himself to it, what enjoyable work it was.

Although, while in his company before, the Veiled Lady had not uncovered her face

for an instant, Earl Lavender had no difficulty in recognising her as the robed beauty with whom he had just exchanged whippings. It was the individuality of her carriage, along with her unusual height, which betrayed her. All her motions were rapid, graceful and full of precision without being precise; and when she was at rest her stillness was like that of a statue—of Galatea waking into life. Had any doubt remained in Earl Lavender's mind as to her identity the sound of the harp-like voice in which she had bidden him put forth his strength would have dispelled it.

'Come,' she said, when she had covered her shoulders.

He took the hand she offered, and they left the Whipping Room, moving in time to the music, which sounded from the apartment they were about to enter. On the threshold he looked back to see how it fared with Lord Brumm. His henchman had been unbound, and was just beginning to repay his chastiser, the roguish-looking girl, who had thrashed him mercilessly; and Earl Lavender,

catching his eye, bowed and smiled to signify his approbation.

In the apartment from which the music came, a vast hall with pillars supporting a lofty roof, no light burned, but floods of the richest colour streamed in from lamps without through many Gothic windows filled with stained glass. The musicians, a hundred men and women, old and young, sat in a minstrels' gallery of carved oak, playing on all kinds of stringed instruments, on wind instruments of wood, with triangles, drums and cymbals. On the shining marble floor, dyed by the lamp-beams, a multitude of all ages moved to the slow measure, dancing in groups or couples ; and every now and again a few of the musicians would leave the gallery, their places being taken by some of the dancers. An expression of radiant seriousness, as far removed from solemnity as from ordinary mirth, sat on the faces of all the dancers. Earl Lavender glanced quickly at his companion, and beheld in her the same high look. He touched her waist, and they joined the dance. For more than

an hour, steeped in colour and sound, they circled among the pillars of the vast hall, unwearied, silent, without need to speak a word. Then the lady led the way to an ante-room where many couples reclined on couches conversing in undertones.

‘Let us rest and talk a little,’ she said.

‘Lady,’ said Earl Lavender, reclining opposite his companions, for the couches were arranged in pairs facing each other, with a little space between. ‘Lady,’ he said, ‘since I became aware that I am the fittest of men, and knew that it is incumbent on me to find and wed the fittest woman, my imagination has figured many ideals, but not my most exquisite dream approached the reality. Most beautiful, most graceful, most lofty-spirited and fittest of women, let us go at once to the proper authority and be married according to the form of this subterranean land—if there be any form that is to say.’

The Lady of the Veil gave him a piercing glance, and said coldly,—

‘There is no marriage, nor giving in marriage here.’

‘Then let us return to the upper world,’ rejoined Earl Lavender, ‘for it becomes us to be married immediately.’

‘I shall never marry,’ said the lady. ‘But why do you keep up this foolish fantasy with me?’

‘Foolish fantasy!’ cried Earl Lavender, starting to his feet. ‘Foolish fantasy! Ah,’ he continued more quietly, resuming his couch, ‘you naturally wish to try me; I may have to pass through many ordeals before Evolution will permit our union. Your indifference is only apparent I am sure. Being the fittest of women, you must love me as I love you. And thus I pass at once the first ordeal. Lady, nothing you can do or say will persuade me that you do not love me, and are not as eager for our union as I am. Think what it means—the union of the fittest man and the fittest woman. Think of the ecstasy and glory of it—the need of it; the world waits for this event—has waited since its creation. The haste which Evolution has

shown in bringing us together on the very first day of the new era points to the propriety of a speedy consummation. If we may not marry here, let us fly at once. Come, lady.'

The lady surveyed him long before she spoke, gradually hiding with the deep fringe of her eyelashes the look of pity that dawned out of the blank amazement in her eyes.


'You do not ask,' she said at length, making no reference to his appeal and wishing to occupy his thoughts with something else, 'for any explanation of the manners and customs of the underground world.'

'I am no longer interested,' he said. 'I was at first astonished, but I am now absorbed entirely by my love for you, and my desire to fulfil at once the intention of Evolution. If there be another ordeal, submit me to it without further delay, oh, fittest among women!'

'I am not the fittest among women,' rejoined the lady, with some resentment. 'There are present here to-night many lovelier, handsomer, stronger, warmer-hearted, better - educated women than I

am. Although you are mad, I beg you not to be foolish.'

'Ah!' exclaimed Earl Lavender, a look of pain crossing his face. 'Now, indeed, you put me to the test. But although at this moment you were to become old and shrivelled, weak and rheumatic, I should still maintain that you are the fittest of women, confident that the first kiss of love would restore you to youth and grace like the bewitched lady in the ballad. Were you to ransack the harems of the East, the palaces of Russia, the homes of the English nobility, and place before me the choice beauties of the world, I should still select you, for I can trust Evolution and read the signs provided. The moment I saw you sitting veiled in the Café Benvenuto, I said to Lord Brumm, "Behold the fittest among women!" And you, dear lady, whispered within yourself, I am certain, "Behold the man of men!" You see with what ease I pass this second ordeal. The third has no terrors for me. You accuse me coldly



of being mad. I am as astonished that you make the accusation as I would have been had the twins not made it. I am not mad, and I know, although you act well, you are only pretending to think me insane. Some sterner ordeal, lady!’

Again the lady looked long at him through her eyelashes before replying.

‘I shall devise an ordeal,’ she said suddenly, as if ending a debate in her own mind. ‘But tell me in the meantime what you think of the new stimulant.’

‘The new stimulant?’

‘Yes; whipping. Examine yourself. Has the intoxication worn off yet?’

‘No,’ answered Earl Lavender; ‘the exalted mood continues. Was it the whipping?—Yes, I believe it was the whipping that roused all my senses.’

‘Not all your senses,’ rejoined the lady; ‘it sets the soul more broad awake than wine. Wine rouses the lower nature also, and the soul, only half-enlightened, continues still surrounded by the fleshly dream, which is the body. The scourge

frees the soul and quells the body. You must have been drunk with wine when you came here, or you would not have talked to me of love.'

'How is this?' began Earl Lavender, remembering some old passages in his reading, wherein whipping is said to rouse the animal passions; but the lady interrupted him.

'I anticipate your objection,' she said. 'Many novices make it, coming here for the first time full-fed and wine-flushed. If the body is already over-stimulated with food and drink, the effect of a moderate whipping is to intensify the existing excitement. Had you drunk much to-night?'

'Not very much,' said Earl Lavender. 'A little whisky, a little beer, and a fair quantity of champagne.'

'Ah!' exclaimed the lady sitting up, 'And your companion. Did he drink as much?'

'Yes; but that is not much. We had no port nor liqueurs.'

'Let us find your friend,' said the lady.

They returned to the Dancing Hall and searched the eddyng throng that now seemed to cover its vast floor; but Lord Brumm was not there. Before withdrawing they turned round on the threshold of the Whipping Room and watched the dancers. Their robes, arms, faces, hair, and twinkling feet, and the floor and the pillars of the hall were all embroidered and enamelled with rich hues and set with many-coloured jewels from the stained and warmly-lit windows. The slow, searching music of strings and wood-pipes seemed always about to open up some new secret of joy, but the cymbals and drums and triangles were unable to reveal it.

‘Why have they no trumpets?’ whispered Earl Lavender. ‘The music aches to burst bounds and soar.’

‘This music and this dance,’ replied the lady, ‘go on in this room endlessly. In the underground world we know neither night nor day. New-comers take the places continually of the players and the dancers who withdraw. The music itself is un-

resolved. Listen attentively, and it seems a softly-wailing question which haunts and troubles forever all who hear it. An answer, an illusive answer comes only in dancing to it. To play it is exquisite pain. See how often the players are changed. Watch their sad faces.'

Earl Lavender looked and sighed.

'And what may this mean?' he said.

'This must be some great allegory.'

'Seek for no meaning in it; it has none. What meaning is there in pain and pleasure? They are twins; that is all we know. Seek no meaning in anything you see here. Images, ideas, flashes of purpose will peer out in all our ways and deeds, but there is no intention here below. Is there any intention anywhere?'

'Intention,' cried Earl Lavender aloud, startling the dancers near him. 'Intention is another name for Evolution; the great purpose that is in the universe. Ho! all ye sad-souled players,' he called out, ascending the steps of the minstrels' gallery, 'and you self-deceived dancers! Is

it purpose or is it meaning you cannot find? Behold in me the purpose of the ages, Earl Lavender, the fittest of men.'

He was not permitted to say more. Five of the dancers, joined by the Lady of the Veil, seized him and led him along a passage he had not yet traversed to a lofty room which bore some resemblance to a court of justice. On a platform sat three reverend-looking men; before them a table covered with books and scrolls. He who occupied the middle seat was clad in a white robe; his co-mates, in red and blue respectively. Opposite the platform, and occupying more than half of the room, was a gallery which speedily filled on the entrance of Earl Lavender and those who accompanied him.

'Judgment, oh, sages!' said the Lady of the Veil.

'And again judgment, oh, sages!' cried another voice.

Looking behind him, Earl Lavender beheld Lord Brumm, also conducted by six denizens of the Underworld, including

the roguish damsel who had whipped him. Earl Lavender's henchman presented a very woebegone appearance. His robe was torn from his shoulders, and his hair tumbled. He was gagged, and his hands tied behind his back; tears stood in his eyes.

'Why, what have *you* done, my good Brumm?' asked Earl Lavender.

'Silence,' said the white-robed sage in a stern voice.

Earl Lavender bowed in submission to the sage's decision, and he and Lord Brumm were placed at the bar.

In reply to a sign from the white-robed sage, the Lady of the Veil, making a profound obeisance, addressed the court.

'Oh, sages,' she said, 'of what the second misdemeanant is accused I cannot tell, but in charging the first, I must speak to the presence of both in this city. I saw these men in the Café Benvenuto, where I tasted a little macaroni after a railway journey of six hours. He, against whom I bear witness, seemed to me worthy of admis-

sion to the Underworld, and in accordance with our established custom, I brought him along with me; his comrade was apparently undetachable. Just now, as we passed through the Hall of Dancing, he ascended the steps of the gallery and cried aloud—I remember his exact words,—“Intention is another name for Evolution; the great purpose that is in the universe. Ho! all ye sad-souled players, and you self-deceived dancers! Is it purpose, is it meaning you cannot find? Behold in me the purpose of the ages, Earl Lavender, the fittest of men.” Before he could proceed further, we seized him and brought him hither.’

‘Has she spoken truly in all points so far as you know?’ asked the white-robed sage of those who had brought Earl Lavender before the judgment-seat. The dancers acquiesced silently in the lady’s deposition.

When the sages had consulted together in whispers, their spokesman announced that they intended to proceed with the second case before sentencing Earl Lavender.

'Oh, sages,' at once began the roguish damsel, making her obeisance, 'you have heard already how this misdemeanor obtained entrance to the Underworld. Judging from his appearance and disinclination to be whipped, I thought him more fitted for the Hall of Fancy than for the Hall of Dancing. There he behaved well; and appeared to enjoy everything that was said. His conduct, however, became foolish during the narration of a love story. He cast what are called sheep's eyes at me, and furtively kissed my hand. I promptly revealed his crime, and we brought him hither. When we seized him he struggled and bellowed, afraid of another whipping, whereupon we gagged and bound him.

'Has she spoken truly in all points so far as you know?' asked the white-robed sage of the roguish girl's companions. They bowed an affirmative.

After a second whispered consultation, the white-robed sage announced the decision of the court, which was the same in both cases, viz.,—that Earl Lavender and

Lord Brumm should be taken at once to the dormitory, put to bed, and in the morning expelled from the underground city.

‘Well, what did I tell you?’ said Earl Lavender, when he and Lord Brumm, hurried away before either could attempt a reply, had been locked into a spacious double-bedded apartment, one of a suite which formed the men’s dormitory. ‘Here are the best beds in London, and changes of linen hanging ready aired.’

Lord Brumm only groaned in reply.

CHAPTER VII

WHAT ELSE MRS SCAMLER SAID TO MAUD EMBLEM

MRS SCAMLER rose betimes, and having breakfasted heartily on tea and eggs and bacon, took a penny 'bus to the Great British Hotel. There she found herself in a difficulty, for she had left her new acquaintance the night before without learning her name.

'I have come to see a young lady,' she said to the hotel porter. 'Tall, dark, handsome, with a fine complexion. She is alone, and is in London on the same kind of errand as myself, which you would be surprised if I were to tell you, but I won't.'

The hotel porter, a decorative official with an attachment of trifling duties, smiled superciliously and looked towards the clerk,

to whom Mrs Scamler straightway addressed herself.

‘What a nice glass case they keep you in,’ she said to the modish clerk.

Mrs Scamler was, as a rule, in high spirits, but in the mornings, and immediately after breakfast, at which she always emptied a teapot to her own share, she would have addressed personalities to a judge on the bench.

‘Madam!’ exclaimed the clerk reproachfully.

He was a tall, important young man, and, rising in his box, he looked down on Mrs Scamler from a great height. But Mrs Scamler leaned her laughing face through the open *portière*, tapped the second lowest button on the clerk’s waistcoat with her gold-rimmed eyeglasses, and said,—

‘Oh! do sit down. I can’t talk to you away up there.’

Down sat the clerk at the magical touch, not dismayed but certainly perplexed. He knew the kind of woman who is easily familiar, and how to deal with her, but Mrs Scamler was a species apart.

'I have just told *him*,' said Mrs Scamler, donning her glasses and looking round at the porter, 'that I am in a difficulty. I want to see a very attractive young lady who lives here just now, but whose name I don't know. She must have an extraordinary history, because we are in London on the same sort of errand, and I am at least double her age. What is her name or the number of her room, do you know?'

'I cannot help you,' said the clerk solemnly. 'An extraordinary history is not necessarily a mark of identification.'

'No,' rejoined Mrs Scamler in some doubt as to the clerk's exact meaning. 'Ah! yes, well,' she continued in a moment as buoyant as ever. 'She is alone, you understand; nobody with her at all. She expects me, and I'll tell you how she's dressed.'

Mrs Scamler went into a minute description, and the clerk knew whom she meant before she had completed it.

'No. 135,' he said, hardly above his breath.

'No. 135,' echoed Mrs Scamler jubilantly. 'Here is my card, porter. Take it to No. 135.'

Bearing cards was not one of the duties attached to the porter's decorative existence, but with the aid of a boy in buttons Mrs Scamler was soon introduced to her companion of the previous night.

'Well, my dear, still at breakfast,' she cried, 'and I finished mine more than half an hour ago.'

'Hush!' exclaimed the young lady.

They were in the *table d'hôte* room, and Mrs Scamler's loud address had drawn all eyes towards them.

'Not so loud? Well, my dear, I am so glad to see you again,' said Mrs Scamler, seating herself at the table where the young lady breakfasted alone. 'Now, where was I?' she continued more quietly. 'We have no time to lose, and have so much to say to each other you know. I had just told you of the arrival of Mr Gurdon at my house in Nettleby-Kingscroft. Yes. Well, he was so difficult. The rules he laid down quite dispelled me. He had a bedroom and a sitting-room on the same floor, and he wasn't to see either me or the ser-

vant from week's end to week's end. He wasn't even to hear us on his flat. He wasn't to be knocked in the morning; he wasn't to be knocked at any time, and if he caught the glimpse of a skirt he would leave without warning. He was one of those mahoganists that no compromise is nothing to. He was at that time a mahoganist to the bitter end, and to such an extent of bitterness that he couldn't endure the sound of a woman's voice however harsh it might be. In the morning he got up at half-past seven, and went for a walk wet *or* dry. Breakfast, luncheon, tea, dinner, walking, reading, eating with a regularity that was awful to think of, and nobody molesting him, he began to be easier in his mind, and sent me notes to take tea with him—he would put them inside the account-book and leave it on the tray at lunch when he had finished and gone to his bedroom or for a walk to let the servant clear away—if I wouldn't speak. And I didn't; I never opened my lips, but poured out his tea, and drank one little cup myself without as much as a smile.

French irregular verbs was nothing to it. My dear, I believe I would have succeeded on the stage, the gravity of my countenance at those silent teas, and the apparent ease with which I maintained a look of profound wisdom were something superhuman. But I suffered for it. I have seen me reduced to such a state of feebleness after half an hour of tea and silence with Mr Gurdon, me acting terribly all the time to appear natural, that I have had to take a glass of brandy and eat a slice of cold beef to sustain my flagging energies till dinner time, talking all the time to the servant. But I had determined to marry Mr Gurdon, and there was no torture I wouldn't cotton to. Well, I had my reward. On the seventh time that I poured out his tea, he spoke. You won't guess what he said?'


'No, unless he offered you marriage.'

'Oh, my dear, he was far too much of a mahoganist to do that in a hurry. No. He said, "Mrs Scamler, are you partial to cleanliness?" "Dear me, Mr Gurdon," I answered, "is there a smudge on your tea-

cup?" "No, ma'am," he replied; and he added with a sigh, "I wish there was." "Lord bless me, Mr Gurdon," I said, "I can tell the servant to blacklead her thumb." "Madam," he replied, in a sorrowful way, "if this house were not so clean, if you were not so clean, with your magnificent gift of silence—but, it is not to be thought of." At that moment I excelled all my efforts in every line in which I have displayed my talents. My heart was thumping at such a rate that it nearly blasted me, and sent my ribs flying like curb stones in a quarry, and my head was bursting like a pot with too much rice in it, but I held my tongue; I didn't say a word. Pale as ashes, I rose from the table and left the room. In five minutes my plan was formed. The very next time Mr Gurdon asked me to pour out his tea I put on a soiled cap, rubbed a smut over the dimple in my left cheek, and sat down with the utmost non-challenge, that I was a wonder to myself. I caught his eye watching me, but I drank my tea as innocent as a child looking out of window,

and seeming to wonder if the rain would go off and I could go out to play. I saw he was gratified; he looked quite cheerful, but he said nothing. Next time he asked for my company—now, my dear, I wish you particularly to observe my method: Oh, woman, in our hours of ease, you know age cannot wither her venerable shade nor custom's tale that is told—I was as fresh and clean as if I had come out of a bandbox, to all outward appearance—and actually, my dear, I saw he was troubled, yet my gravity and innocence were as marvellous as ever. But when I was giving him his second cup of tea, I put out my boot to press the coal down in the fire, and a change came over his face immediately. My white stocking—that afternoon clean on, and bought the day before—had a little ragged hole in it which I made with a skewer, and the servant had given my instep a dust with the blacking-brush. Well, when he saw it, his face brightened up and he nearly spoke. Next time there wasn't a speck about me. He looked at my hands and face, and I

showed him my ankles. He made some excuse to rise, and I believe he examined my ears. I never saw a man in such a state. He took only one cup of tea ; for the first time banged out of the room, leaving me there, and didn't ask to see me again for a fortnight. Then, when the invitation came, I entered upon the scene with my hair in some slight disorder—but really quite becoming—a button off my bodice, and a soiled collar, His eyes sparkled ; he drank three cups of tea hard after each other, and then said,—“Madam, I trust—indeed, I believe that you are not a scourer?” “Lord bless me, Mr Gurdon,” I said, “I wouldn't be such a thing for all the world.” “I am very glad to hear it, ma'am,” says he, and not another word passed his lips that day. You can imagine how keen I was to know why he delighted in dirt, and after three or four more appearances of mine, always with an untidy beauty spot of some kind, he told me. “Madam,” he said, “I congratulate you that you are not fanatically clean ; I congratulate you that you are not a scourer.



Were there more women like you in the world there would be fewer mahoganists." "Lord bless me, Mr Gurdon," I said; "if the world's to be saved by sluts, why it's saved already." "I doubt it," he said, quite serious; "I doubt it, madam, I have been married twice to scourers." "Oh, Mr Gurdon, how dreadful!" I says, all of a tremble; meaning how dreadful it was to be a man's third wife, but he took me to mean how dreadful it was to be married twice to scourers. "You may well say dreadful," he replied. "My first wife, Mrs Scamler, lived to clean. The forefinger of her right hand was polished like bone with rubbing it along ledges and chair-backs in search of dust. Her servants seldom endured her beyond a fortnight. She swept and dusted and scrubbed, and made them sweep and dust and scrub from morning to night, and dreamt of nothing but sweeping and dusting and scrubbing. She would mutter in her sleep,—'There's a cobweb inside that egg, Jane; I'm sure of it.' She would dust a thing twenty times a day, and

exclaim and sigh and look for sympathy. And she was a fairly intelligent woman, Mrs Scamler, remember; knew a little of most things, and had once read a lot; but she had taken to dusting as a man takes to dram-drinking. She ruined her body and soul with it; didn't even read the newspapers, and died after we had been married three years. She was almost the death of me too. I was worn to a skeleton, and the only thing that gave me a desire for life was that she left me a decent little income."

'What a selfish creature Mr Gurdon must be!' exclaimed the young lady.

'Lord bless me, no,' said Mrs Scamler. 'He's the best middle-aged gentleman I ever met. His second wife was a widow—with means. He had known her for years, and admired her untidiness hugely—in the tempestuous petticoat—how does it go?—that doth denote—the outside of the platter was full of rottenness and dead men's bones—you know; but within—why she was a sort of literary lady, he told me,

and wrote stories in a weekly paper with her hair coming down, and ink and dirty nails all over her person, for her first husband had been a nincompoop: so she married Mr Gurdon, and immediately she took to dusting. No more stories, no more untidiness and comfort, but sighing and scouring, and seeing spots in sun, moon and stars, pots, pans, plates, chairs, tables, all round the dark terrestrial ball. Mr Gurdon pined away. It became plain to him that it was the effect of himself to make women dust—such a clean, spick-and-span gentleman who couldn't get dirty if he wanted to. He exposulated; but she was bound to dust or die, she said. So, he cried, "Die and be—" He did, my dear; and she stopped dusting and died, and he inherited her money. Then he came to me, a confirmed mahoganist, and I angled for him so well, my dear, pretending silence and untidiness, that at last he offered me marriage in the bluntest manner, and I named the day just as bluntly. "My dear Mrs Scamler," he said, "will you marry me

with a black on your nose?" "Lord bless me, yes, Mr Gurdon," I replied; "on Tuesday week, and you shall put the black on yourself, my dear." "Shall I?" he cried, as beaming as a waiter you give a shilling. "That will be the true marriage ceremony. Remember, when I put the black on your nose we are man and wife; the ring and the priest are mere falals after that." You can imagine how I hurried on everything—silently, and always with a dirty spot somewhere or other, and a hole in my stocking or a torn handkerchief, for I saw a lot of Mr Gurdon and he watched me closely. The tension was terrible, but I endured to the end, and on the Monday night Mr Gurdon went to the hotel, as it would never have done for us both to go to church from the same house. Well, on Tuesday morning, I was sitting waiting with a beautiful little bit of soot on a handkerchief for him to dab on my nose—he was to come at ten and then go back to the hotel and drive to church for half-past—when in comes a waiter with

the news that Mr Gurdon hadn't been seen since eleven o'clock the night before. But your breakfast's done, my dear, and you seem fidgety, so I'll just hurry and be done, too. He hadn't been seen at Nettleby-Kingscroft Station; but at a village, three miles away, he had jumped into a London train. So instead of a wedding I began a hunt—without a tear, my dear, almost without a sigh; for what I want is to be occupied, and I really am enjoying myself. I put on this dress, and got myself up as he would love to see me—a little dash of untidiness, a little speck of dirt, and set off in pursuit. I arrived at Waterloo Station, and drove straight to Pilkington's, where I was known. I have been searching London ever since — restaurants, hotels, lodging-houses—'

'Did you inquire at this hotel?'

asked the young lady.

'No, my dear, I omitted it, forgot all about it, it lies so out of the way, until you mentioned it last night.'

'If you had come here any time before

yesterday you would have found Mr Gurdon.'

'Lord bless me, you don't say so! How did you find it out?'


'I have an interest in his companion,' rejoined the young lady, speaking carefully, 'and came to London yesterday morning to see him. I asked a cabman at Liverpool Street to take me to a good, quiet hotel, and he drove me here. Just as the cab drew up, I saw my friend and the gentleman I suppose to be Mr Gurdon leaving. My first thought was to follow them, but instead, I inquired of the porter if they were staying here, and he said they were, which set my mind at rest.'

'And have you seen them again?'

'No; I find they have not returned yet. Do you think they will come back?'

'I have a presentiment they won't,' said Mrs Scamler.

'And so had I yesterday. They were generally in the habit of lunching here. Now, they didn't do so yesterday, and I thought at once they had left for good. I was so sure of it, that in the afternoon I went



out to search for them. They had never dined in the hotel, so in Holborn, in Oxford Street, in Regent Street, in the Strand—'

'Just what I did daily!'

'I went into every decent-looking restaurant, and looked about for them. When anyone spoke to me, I said I was searching for some friends, and was not quite certain which restaurant they had chosen. At last I came to a pleasant little place in the Strand, where I summoned up courage to describe my friend to a waiter. He said he had noticed such a gentleman, but that he was not alone. He had noticed him because, although quite cheerful, he seemed down on his luck, and had discussed expenses very carefully with his companion. I questioned him closely, and as he hesitated in his answers, I told him not to be afraid, and stirred up his courage with half-a-crown. He had watched them go westward, talking earnestly, and then had seen them returning on the other side, and he guessed from the business-like way in which they walked, and the unsatisfied looks they had cast at the joints and fowls as they

left his restaurant, that their minds were made up to spend their last shilling on something more to eat, perhaps in some beef shop about Ludgate Circus. I went into every restaurant and eating-house on the way to Ludgate Circus, asking for those I sought, having got a description of Mr Gurdon from the waiter, and arrived at the "Cap-and-Bells" only a few minutes after they had left in a cab.'

'And I know the rest!' cried Mrs Scamler. 'Most extraordinary, my dear. I followed almost the same plan. Only I started with a detective. Oh, I was to tell you about that! Well, I made an appointment with a private detective at Pilkington's, and told him plainly, as I have told you, all about Mr Gurdon. He ruminated, and said he would require ten shillings a day, and ten shillings expenses. An expensive-looking man he was. His clothes were expensive, and his jewellery, and so was his nose, my dear; but his eyes were piercing. I gave him a pound, and he went away without a word, leaving me at peace with the world, for I had great hopes of him, and his name was William

Wellington. Next day he came back with a blue note-book full of stuff, which he read me, about public - houses, betting clubs, supper clubs, billiards and baccarat, and was out of pocket ten shillings in drinks and tips expended in acquiring information, which I paid him, and asked him what it was all about. He said it was a problem which he was solving on his own lines, and didn't want no interference. Well, I trusted him still, and gave him another pound, and he came back next day and said he was still at sea. He had been to more clubs and public-houses, and had a black eye, for which he wanted five shillings. I began to see his little game, so I asked him sternly if he had heard anything at all about Mr Gurdon, and he said he was on his tracks, but I assumed a sort of black-cap expression of face, and kept him to the point, yes or no, had he or had he not heard anything of Mr Gurdon. "No; he couldn't exactly—" "Quite so," says I; "and I want to tell you, Mr William Wellington, that Mr Gurdon wouldn't go to no

such places as these, and I believe you are simply spending my money on your own guilty pleasures." "Guilty pleasures!" he echoes, making a note of it very fierce. "You've heard of an action of damages for libel, I suppose?" "Yes, I have," says I. "And *you've* heard of imprisonment for obtaining money under false pretences." Seeing me so sharp with him, he changed his tune, and he asks me quite sorrowful and huffed,—“Where are the documents in the case? Where's the mystery of it? A gent goes away the night before his wedding, and can't be heard of. But there ain't no mystery in that. Haven't you got a will, or a nannygram, or some kind of blooming puzzle—something to give a man a start. There ain't no glory in finding a man that's run away, unless he's run away *for* something. Where's your clue? All the detectives I ever read about get a clue, and all they have to do is just to follow it like the cove did in the labyrinth; they can't go wrong. Here you have a man that vanishes; but why did he vanish?

that's what I want to know. Did a former wife turn up hearing of his marriage, or somebody that knows of a murder or robbery he did? Tell me that, and I'll find the man." "Mr William Wellington," I said, "I have told you that Mr Gurdon's wives can't turn up till Doomsday, and then there'll be a pulling of caps who'll have him! Gabriel can give the scourers their own tombstones to wash and scrub, and see who'll be done first, and they'll sniff disdainfully at me, his third; but I'll just tuck up my shroud and waltz in through the golden gate while their backs are turned with the best of middle-aged angels, for the last shall be first; and as for murders and robberies, you might as well accuse the babe unblessed, unhonoured and unhung." He looked at me with his eyes starting, and said nothing; and then I was struck all of a heap with an idea. "A clue!" I cried. "Is it a clue you want? Then I'll tell you. It's a deputation—an informal deputation that did it—the butcher's, the chemist's and the schoolmaster's wife;

they must have gone to him as soon as he went to the hotel and told him how I studied the French language and model drawing. He's such a fine old-fashioned, middle-aged gentleman, that the very notion of the French language would turn his stomach; and to think of taking to his bosom a woman that had gone as far as them dissolute, irregular verbs of her own head, and all without a master, was more than he could stand. He thinks I'm *fang-de-seeyacle*, poor dear Mr Gurdon!—and I shouldn't wonder if they told him I would insist on his getting up on the parlour table when I came to study the nude in my model drawing. Oh! the vile creatures! There's a clue, Mr Wellington! Go and follow it!" When he found words, which he was some time in doing, he said he could see no clue in that. "A piece of nonsense," he said. "Who ever heard of a deputation being a clue, and of a man running away because his wife learned French? I never even read of such a thing. Give me a forged cheque, or a blood-stained weapon,

or a servant girl that's made a slip, or a paper about the length of the shadow of an old tree that isn't there, and I'll work it out—robbery, murder, suicide, sudden death or hidden treasure; but don't insult me with gibberish about deputations and learning French." "Mr Wellington," I said, putting on my black-cap expression, "*are* you a detective?" "Am I a detective?" he cries with a hollow laugh. "What have you paid me two pound ten for?" "Ay," says I; "for what?" looking him through and through. "For larks, and drinks, and bets. You're no more a detective than I am, William Wellington. You're a leather merchant's clerk or a draper's assistant, and your head's been turned with reading stories." I consider it was very daring of me to say that, because I didn't know; but I was right, and he gave me back six and five-pence ha'penny, and begged me not to split on him, and scuttled away as pale's his shirt—was once. Then I took up my case myself, and worked it out just as you did with a difference. At first I thought of

going through the streets like the heathen lady that married Thomas à Becket's father, and calling out,—“Walter Gurdon! Walter Gurdon!” until I found him; but the streets of London must have been different then, for it's quite certain I would have been run in, so I simply went from restaurant to restaurant, and asked plump and plain if Mr Gurdon of Nettleby-Kingscroft was here, and nobody knew anything about him until I came to the “Cap-and-Bells” and found you. And now, my dear, we must start again in search of our gentlemen.’

‘Yes, and we must go through the eating-houses as before. I'll tell you what, Mrs Scamler, we'll part company outside, you one way and I another, and at eight o'clock to-night meet again in the “Cap-and-Bells” with or without—our gentlemen.’

‘Now, see what it is to be young and have a head. That's a most capital idea. But if a telegram should come to Pilkington's?’

‘I think,’ said the young lady, ‘you needn't concern yourself about that, because you remember you left no money.’

‘Neither I did. Why, what was I dreaming about?’

Now the young lady’s plan was devised for the purpose of getting rid of Mrs Scamler, in order that she might go at once to the ‘Cap-and-Bells’ and resume her inquiry where she had left it off, without the encumbrance of the loquacious widow.

CHAPTER VIII

HOW THEY CHASED EACH OTHER IN HANSOM CABS

THE morning was well advanced before Earl Lavender and Lord Brumm were despatched into the upper air. The dignified old man who escorted them explained that by the laws of the Underworld they might return if they chose, one more visit at least being always permitted to those who inadvertently or in a moment of passion committed a minor offence.

‘What,’ asked Earl Lavender, ‘is done in the case of a second offence?’

‘The offender is ignominiously ejected never to be readmitted.’

‘Ignominiously?’

‘Yes; he is stripped to his shirt and thrust

into the streets at noon, thus experiencing actually one of the commonest and most distressing of nightmares.'

Earl Lavender made no reply, and he and Lord Brumm, having left Rookwood Square, entered Piccadilly by Rookwood Mews.

'Let us breakfast,' said Earl Lavender, 'at the "Cap-and-Bells."'

They went arm-in-arm by St James's Street, Pall Mall, the Strand and Fleet Street to Deadman's Alley, and kept up a conversation all the way.

'Since the porter of the Underworld described the sentence for a second offence I have been thinking, good Brumm,' said Earl Lavender, 'that such a punishment should have no terrors for a true Evolutionist.'

Lord Brumm groaned.

'Come, come, you must be cheerful,' said Earl Lavender. 'To be cheerful and pleasant is the whole duty of man. To be penitent, to be afraid and suspicious, to doubt actual humanity, and believe in impossible

divinity is no part of Evolution. Be happy; that is the new gospel. Arise and be happy. Do not say if I were this, if I were that, if I had this, if I had that, then were I fortunate and blessed, but be happy now at once. I see,' cried Earl Lavender, clutching Lord Brumm's arm, and summoning up with a lordly gesture the vision he described, 'I see the entire world happy by simply being so. It is a mere matter of mood, and when all people say, "Misery is past, let us arise and be happy," then we have the Evolutionary Era, and the Survival of the Fittest.'

'How can I be happy?' exclaimed Lord Brumm plaintively.

'I know your difficulty,' replied Earl Lavender. 'To be happy suddenly is a greater feat than a death-bed conversion. It is so easy, so hereditary to believe in something not ourselves. Belief in self is happiness. The power of conception is a sponge; in most men every pore of it is choked and foul. The average mind is a dirty sponge in a bathroom; it must be wrung out, washed clean, and kept in run-

ning water—that is, Evolution must pour continuously through it, so that it may remain itself, and be no more a nauseous congestion. Your mind is being wrung out, good Brumm ; you will soon be happy. But I was talking of something else. Yes ; this punishment of being set adrift at noon in one's shirt attracts me. I should like to incur it, for I should at once fling off my shirt and walk through the streets a mother-naked man. Unless I am greatly mistaken, the matchless symmetry of my figure, and the beauty and perfection of my face and person, would bewitch all beholders. It must be done ; this will be the great test of my fitness, and of the truth of my mission. If I succeed in walking unmolested from St Paul's to Westminster at noon clad only in my native fitness, I shall practically have accomplished my mission. Yes, and if no occasion arises I shall do it on my own initiative. You shall accompany me, Brumm. You might, perhaps, take off some of your clothes—not to countenance me but to show your sympathy. Your

figure begins to hang forward, you know ; you could hardly appear in the garb of an athlete. However, if you choose to risk it, I have over estimated myself much more than is likely if my supreme fitness failed to protect us both.'

It took some time before Lord Brumm could furnish a reply. This crowning extravagance of Earl Lavender's stirred his sluggish mind, and a dim joke struggled to the surface.

'I would strip too,' he said at last.

'Bravo !' cried Earl Lavender.

'But I would wear a board back and front, and be your sandwichman.'

'A brilliant idea ! On one board you could have, "Behold the Purpose of the Ages," and on the other, "The Fit shall survive, and Earl Lavender is the fittest." Oh, it is a noble suggestion ! Brumm, you are invaluable. Last night we performed wonders ; to-day the whole world shall ring with our deeds. After breakfast we shall arrange our march from St. Paul's to Westminster, you naked, but sandwiched between two boards ;

I naked, but sandwiched between the Past and the Future.'

Fired with this lofty idea, Earl Lavender hurried along at a great pace, dragging Lord Brumm with him. Arrived at the 'Cap-and-Bells,' they entered precipitately the room in which they had dined the night before, and seating themselves at the table they had formerly occupied, they lifted up their eyes, and beheld opposite them a pleasant-looking matronly lady.

'Mrs Scamler!' groaned Lord Brumm, turning as white as a sheet.

'Mr Gurdon—my dear Mr Gurdon!' exclaimed Mrs Scamler, who had been engaged in an animated conversation with the assistant waiter. 'However could you do it?'

Mr Gurdon groaned.

'I forgive you, dear; don't be downcast,' said Mrs Scamler tenderly. 'And this is the young lady's gentleman,' she continued, indicating Earl Lavender with her eyeglasses. 'Oh, sir, you must know that I have met your young lady — 135's her number, Great British Hotel — and we're

the best friends in the world. I've played her a little trick I confess; because we arranged that we were to go round the restaurants as usual in pursuit of our gentlemen, and meet here at night; but something led me to the "Cap-and-Bells" at once, and my instinct was right, you see. Instinct—what is it the poet says?—

'Instinct succeeds where angels fear to tread.'

For the first time since his great mission began, a concerned expression stole across Earl Lavender's face.

'Whom do you mean by my young lady?' he said to Mrs Scamler.

'No. 135,' replied Mrs Scamler; 'a lovely and most delightful person.'

'No. 135!' repeated Earl Lavender. 'Clearly this is an escaped lunatic. Waiter, call a policeman.'

'Well, I never!' cried Mrs Scamler, pushing back her chair, and nearly upsetting the table. 'Mr Gurdon, can you sit still, and hear that said?'

Lord Brumm writhed and groaned, and

would probably have made some reply had not Earl Lavender forestalled him.

‘Do you know this person, Brumm?’ he said. ‘Never saw her before,’ whispered Lord Brumm, catching his breath.

‘Quite so. Waiter, have this person ejected at once. She is clearly an impostor by habit and repute. The city swarms with her kind.’

Mrs Scamler stood up, staggered, and fainted away. The junior waiter sprang to her assistance, and Lord Brumm sheepishly took one of her hands. Misery, fear and shame devoured the latter; and yet he had momentary intervals of respite when he observed that Mrs Scamler’s nails were dirty, that there was a hole in one of her stockings, and that her bodice was soiled.

‘Brumm,’ said Earl Lavender sternly, stepping towards his henchman, ‘you do know this woman.’

Lord Brumm mumbled something indistinctly.

‘I see you know her,’ continued Earl

Lavender. 'You must now at once make choice between her and me—perhaps she is your wife already; make choice between all the worn-out ways of the world, and the great era we have inaugurated. I go; follow me, or stay behind, as you choose.'

As Earl Lavender turned towards the door a shadow darkened it, and she whom Mrs Scamler had denominated his young lady stood before him. He stepped back involuntarily, saying under his breath, 'Maud!' and sat down in a chair, his action, attitude and whole expression indicating the deepest agitation. The young lady stood quite still, very pale, breathing with difficulty, and every whit as disquieted as Earl Lavender. In his corner the head waiter looked on powerless and speechless; Lord Brumm dropped Mrs Scamler's hand, and the assistant paused in his attempts to restore that remarkable widow. There is no saying how long Earl Lavender and the young lady might have continued staring at each other, with the waiters and Lord Brumm watching them,

for the spell that held them was suddenly dissolved. Finding herself no longer attended to, Mrs Scamler opened her eyes, sat up in the midst of the sawdusted floor, looked about, and exclaimed,—

‘Lord bless! me!—My dearest No. 135,’ she continued, when all eyes were turned towards herself, ‘I owe you an apology, and you owe me one, so that there is no need to make them, as like draws to like and chancels each other, which I suppose is a way of saying that the two become one, though why marriage should score the couple out I never knew. I determined as soon as I left you to come straight away down here and prosecute my inquiries from this basin—or base, is it?—we *are* playing a kind of game you know; and you did the same, my dear, clearly; only I took a cab, and perhaps you walked.’

During Mrs Scamler’s remarks the young lady had entered the room. Standing on Earl Lavender’s right side, she laid her left hand on his shoulder, and looked round and down at him with such an almost irre-

sistible appeal that he had lifted her fingers to his lips before he recollected himself and his great mission. Then he tossed her hand aside, sprang up, and crying 'Away, Brumm! Fly!' he ran out of the tavern. His henchman was not slow to follow, groaning and grumbling at his horrid fate.

'Come, Mrs Scamler,' said the young lady, after a moment's weakness and a moment's irresolution. 'They must not escape us.'

'That they mustn't,' replied Mrs Scamler, gathering herself up, shaking the sawdust from her clothes, and talking breathlessly as she tripped after her companion. 'But hear me, my dear; when I am Mrs Gurdon, I swear by yonder sun—roll on, though deep and dark blue orb, as the poet says, though why, beats me—to visit my husband with all the weight of my indignation once a week. I shall invent a punishment, let me see. I shall make him be present at the weekly washing, or at the cleaning of a room; or I shall dust the whole day in his presence. Oh, he shall suffer! Why

there they are! Look! What audacious villains!'

They had pursued Earl Lavender and Lord Brumm through Deadman's Alley, down Fleet Street and into Farringdon Street—in spite of the three turnings only a short distance. While the young lady had had them in view from the start, Mrs Scamler's exclamation was produced by her first sight of them in the very act of riding away from a cab stand; Earl Lavender on the box of a hansom, and Lord Brumm, pale with terror, huddled together inside. Without hesitating the young lady sprang into another hansom with Mrs Scamler close at her heels, and bade the driver follow Earl Lavender. The man whose cab had been purloined ran after it a little way. Speedily convinced, however, from the rate at which his horse was driven, that this was no mere frolic, he enlisted the services of a brother jarvey, and the chase, two hansoms pursuing one, rattled under Holborn Viaduct, across Charterhouse Street, and along Clerkenwell Road into Old

Street. The break-neck pace of the start soon gave way to a trot. Stoppages at crossings, and the current of the traffic had compelled an ordinary rate of motion in these main thoroughfares, but when they had crossed the City Road, Earl Lavender, instead of continuing along Old Street, turned off to the left into a labyrinth of side streets where there were few vehicles, and whipped up his hack until it flourished its hoofs in a vain endeavour to break into a gallop. At a distance of a hundred yards the ladies' cab thundered after, their hack rivalling in action the grotesque exhibition of the leader. The last horse seemed to be of better mettle than the other two, for at this point in the race it made greater progress with less signs of effort ; but, alas ! at a sharp turn it stumbled and fell, breaking one of the shafts. The robbed cabman and his driver swore at each other and at the perversity of things, and the former, followed by a volley of oaths that seemed to crackle in the air, set off after his property on foot. When he had gone about a furlong he heard

a running step behind which soon overtook him.

‘Heh! heh!’ cried a high, harsh voice at his ear. ‘I zee ’im vrom my vintow ov my room. He lose me my situacion. He no understant. Ve catch ’im, ant ve ’afe off ’im vun, dwo revench.’

‘He’s stolen my cab,’ panted the driver.

‘Steal a cab!’ cried the baboon-faced waiter. ‘*Sacré!* He is ze teffil, but he matters not.’

A number of boys and idle men now joined the chase, and one of the latter, finding things hardly as lively as he required, bawled in a huge voice, ‘Stop thief! stop thief!’ The cabman, cursing his own stupidity in not having raised the hue and cry earlier, echoed him, and immediately the whole crowd took it up.

‘Ze boleece!’ sobbed the waiter. ‘Tell ze boleece. I s’all yet zee him in ze mill-wheel hum.’

A constable, rapidly informed of the circumstances, raised the more likely shout of ‘Stop, cab!’ blew his whistle and joined

the chase. This was in the Kingsland Road, the cabman and his company having made an involved journey through the streets of Hoxton. Another constable, stationed at the bridge over the Regent's Canal, which is crossed by the Kingsland Road, hearing the whistle and the shouts, and seeing the running crowd, stopped the entire traffic, and the cabman, coming up, went straight to his property — as he supposed. But the cab he had had his eye on was not his; nor was the one behind it that which the ladies had commissioned: they were both occupied by sporting gentlemen bound for a trotting match at the Alexandra Park. Only two other cabs were in the block, and they were empty, being on their way to fulfil engagements.

The taunts of his brothers of the whip, the jeers of the mob who looked on themselves as having been hoaxed, and the suspicious glances of the policeman exasperated the cabman to such a pitch that he upset a butcher with his left elbow and

a lawyer's clerk with his right, and rushed through the crowd roaring like an enraged bull. Over the bridge he went, followed by the baboon-faced waiter, and a section of his former retinue.

'Pachiens! pachiens!' cried the waiter. 'Ve s'all not be escaped. Come in here; come, I say.'

He dragged the scarcely resisting cabman into a public-house, and the remnant of the crowd soon dwindled away, leaving only a few boys who stuck their heads in at the door and uttered remarks more or less original.

'Oo stole the cab? Garn!' said one.

'E 'ad it in 'is watch-pocket hall the tyme,' said another.

'E's p'yed for it,' said a third. 'It's a bloomin' advertisement—"The Myst'ry of a 'Ansom Cabby."''

The length of the last remark detained the speaker for a sufficient time to allow the waiter, who had been watching for an opportunity, to hit him sharply on the nose with a cork. This unexpected reply was

followed by much shouting, but no more heads appeared in the door. And so the first episode in the chase ended.

‘Now,’ said the waiter, assuming the command, ‘ve vait here till ze cabs come.’

‘What do you mean?’ asked the cabman in a very surly manner.

‘Pachiens!’ replied the waiter. ‘Here iss beer, trink it; a tabble, zit; a schkreent vintow, vatch. I know zis bart of Lonton vell. *Bonne mère*, I know him! Ve vollowt ze wrong cabs at zome turn in zat vilderness; but ze cabs must come in ze Kingslant Roat.’

‘How’s that?’

‘Musd ze poor vaiter on his Lonton instruct ze cabman? Ze cabs musd come—almost zay musd come in ze Kingslant Roat, or svim ze canal.’

‘Blow that; there’s plenty of bridges.’

But the waiter insisted that the cab-stealer, meaning to get out of London, would keep towards the east, and without fail cross the canal by Kingsland Road.

‘Why not by Brunswick Street—further east still?’ queried the cabman.

‘Ve cannot tell’ replied the waiter; ‘ve know noth-ing; ve musd ’afe vaith and risk. Ve neet him by Kingslant Roat. God vill zend him. Revench!’

‘He’s far past the canal by this time, I bet,’ rejoined the cabman with a resigned sigh.

‘Oh, no! He vander and vander in Oxtown. Come, ve meet him at ze bridge.’

The waiter took the cabman by the arm, and they left the public-house. A shout and a shower of mud from an ambuscade of boys greeted them; but they had no time to retaliate. About fifty yards further north than the public-house two cabs whirled round a corner making towards Dalston.

‘Didn’t I tell you!’ cried the cabman. ‘They kept west, and crossed by Whitmore Street.’

‘I vas righd alzo,’ insisted the waiter. ‘In ze Kingslant Road zay come.—

it into a field. Proud of his adventure, Earl Lavender then strode into Epping Forest, accompanied by Lord Brumm, now a ghastly spectacle.

CHAPTER IX

EARL LAVENDER'S EXTRAORDINARY DISCOVERY

WHEN Earl Lavender and his henchman had travelled a furlong or two along a broad grassy path, both in total silence, they were involuntarily brought to a sudden halt by the most extraordinary sound ever mortal heard. It rose out of the forest on their right, and its source seemed not far off.

'What can it be?' exclaimed Lord Brumm.

'It's like the screech of a soul in hell, basted by one devil and tickled by another,' replied Earl Lavender.

'There it's again,' said Brumm.

The amazing sound continued to rise

and fall in prolonged shrieks, and seemed indeed the outcry of a sufferer, who, although undergoing the most horrible torture, had yet a sense of something irresistibly humorous.

‘I must know what this is,’ said Earl Lavender, turning in the direction of the sounds, and beginning to force a way through the undergrowth, which at this part of the forest was almost impenetrable. Brumm, afraid to be left alone, followed his leader, receiving many a back-hander from the branches of the thorns and brambles through which Earl Lavender cleft a passage.

Little more than a dozen yards from the woodland path, they came upon the source of the extraordinary sounds as suddenly and unexpectedly as the sounds themselves had burst upon their ears. In a small open space, in the centre of which was a slight eminence, there sat a thing so preposterous and unheard of that Earl Lavender fell into a muse, lasting fully five minutes, and Lord



Brumm, crouching behind his chief, sweated with distress and peeped occasionally, pale and terrified, at the frightful object of their wonder. Some compound monster it seemed—a double jinn or deeve sweetening its solitude with music. One of its bodies in a short dress of scarlet and black check lay prone on the earth, its face buried in the grass, its half-naked, red-haired legs and shaggy red head, and, indeed, the whole demi-jinn apparently writhing with delight in the discordant sounds discoursed by the other half of its anatomy. It was difficult to tell from the position of the monster how the two bodies were joined, that one which produced the music seemed to be sitting between the shoulders of the other, holding with its lower limbs those of the prone portion—a position from which Earl Lavender inferred that the creature, unlike the Siamese twins, was joined at the back. The sitting half of this divided entity was dressed in chestnut-coloured skins—

a strange choice considering the time of the year; wore on its head a Scotch bonnet and feather, and played upon a bagpipe. Its face, surrounded by russet hair was of a horrible bluish-grey hue, and as it blew up its chanter, its distended cheeks, protruding with the jaw far beyond the line of the brow, gave the creature such an expression of brutality and stupidity combined, that Lord Brumm, by the time he had grown somewhat accustomed to the sight, could not restrain a sickly smile.

This extraordinary monster, oblivious of the presence of human beings, continued intent upon its music, although, except for a fixed idea of the necessity of blowing, it seemed to have but little skill on the bagpipes. It did make some attempt to govern the ventages with its hairy fingers, but so ineptly that it was clear its hands were wholly unused to manipulation of any kind. It was evidently quite ignorant also of the advantages of compressing the bag; its whole science consisted in blowing

fiercely, and a hazardous touching of the stops. Great and sounding inhalations were succeeded by long efforts of expulsion, in which its cheeks rivalled the inflation of the wind-bag, and became in hue as black as a sloe, while its deep-sunk eyes danced and flamed above its blown face. The hideous broken yelling of the bagpipes was accompanied by the voice of the prone division of the monster in a monotonous chant. 'Hi! hi! hi!' it shrieked continuously in seeming wild enjoyment of the music.

Earl Lavender surveyed this amazing object with boundless interest for fully five minutes, and then, turning to his henchman, he said radiantly,—

'Our luck is almost incredible. My good Brumm, I am much mistaken if this is not the Missing Link. It must be so, and here you see, Brumm, how science, counting its steps and feeling about it at every footfall with all kinds of tests, may yet go astray. It is now demonstrated by our discovery of this double creature on the very

first morning of the new era that the effort of Nature in evolving man from the lower animals produced a bi-formed beast, one portion of which became the progenitor of the human race, the other of the monkey tribe. Only in this way could mankind have been accomplished, because by no other means could the cruder brutishness be separated from the higher qualities of the animal creation ; hence the ape is the most abominable of all beasts, the sink of all the vileness of the blood of the world. In the missing link, however, as the separation is not yet final, there is an intermixture of properties, and we shall doubtless find both members of this duality less human than man, less brutish than the ape.'

Even the gist of these remarks failed to penetrate to the mind of Lord Brumm ; the squealing of the bagpipes and the monotonous chant of the monster prevented him from hearing more than a few detached words ; besides, had there been no deafening noise, the state of fear in which he was would

have prevented him from grasping Earl Lavender's meaning.

Having instructed his follower to the best of his ability in the natural history of their stupendous discovery, Earl Lavender stepped from the shadow of the trees and stood in front of the piping portion of the bi-formed beast.

'Most noble Missing Link!' he shouted; but the creature, absorbed in its music, neither heard nor saw. 'Marvellous beast!' began Earl Lavender again, this time laying his hand upon its shoulder.

The piping stopped at once, and the monotonous chant ceased also; the erect portion of the monster looked inquiringly at Earl Lavender, and the prone portion became strangely agitated.

'My dear monster,' resumed Earl Lavender, 'the pleasure I have in greeting you, the Missing Link, might be surpassed only by your pleasure in beholding me, the fittest of all creatures. Perhaps, however, you are inclined to think that I must wish to compass your destruction in order to

obliterate all trace of the brutal origin of man ; but fear not, for last night the Evolutionary Era began, and since it is our desire to find out and publish the relationship of humanity, even with the most insignificant and despised of crawling things, how shall we repudiate consanguinity with our nearest connections ?'

'Earl Lavender ! Earl Lavender !' cried the prone voice.

'Tis he,' rejoined Earl Lavender proudly. 'Behold, good Brumm, the missing link acknowledges me by my name.'

'Save me ! save me !' cried the prone voice.

'Now,' said Earl Lavender, again addressing Lord Brumm, 'you have proof of the correctness of my theory of this creature. It is the more human half which cries to us, wishing to be delivered from its brutal companion. Have patience, brother,' he continued to the monster, 'you shall be delivered. But you must instruct us how to secure you. When we have bound you we shall take you to London, and the foremost surgeons in the land, be-

fore a crowded theatre of savants, shall separate you from the body of this death. How shall we bind you?’

‘Man alive!’ grunted the prone voice, ‘don’t you see I’m being choked by this ape?’

‘I see it—I know it,’ replied Earl Lavender, ‘and I shall help you at once; to doubt my ability to encounter the Missing Link is to be unfaithful to myself, the fittest of men.’

The sitting portion of the creature had remained quite motionless during this conversation, but as soon as Earl Lavender moved upon it menacingly, it flung the bagpipes at Lord Brumm, who had kept apart from his chief, and uttering a cry between a bark and a shriek, seized Earl Lavender in one hand, while it held on with the other to the prone figure. The latter, it was now apparent, formed a separate entity, but Earl Lavender had no time to be astonished; the ape was throttling him.

‘Help!’ he shouted with his failing breath. ‘Help, good Brumm!’

Help he needed ; his struggles in the sinewy grasp of the enraged animal were futile ; and this wonderful history would have come to a sudden end, had not the other part of the *soi-disant* Missing Link succeeded in releasing itself by a powerful effort.

‘Rorison!’ exclaimed Brumm, who had fallen trembling on his knees.

Rorison it was in Rob Roy tartan. Without waiting to recover breath, the Scotchman clutched the ape by the ears and tore it from its hold. Earl Lavender, finding himself at liberty, seized the beast’s lower limbs, and for a second or two it hung suspended between the two men ; but the enormous length and strength of its arms enabled it, behind its back, to grapple and overturn Rorison, and immediately, to their astonishment, the combatants found themselves in their original positions, the only difference being that Rorison was now recumbent.

At this crisis Lord Brumm saved Earl Lavender’s life ; and for a second time in as many minutes an abrupt conclusion to this full and true account was obviated by the

veriest chance, or rather by an undiscovered Evolutionary law. Tongue-tied hitherto, except for his single cry of astonishment on recognising Rorison, Lord Brumm, helpless and despairing, suddenly set up a dreadful howl, so unexpected, so piercing and unearthly, that the ape paused in the very act of strangling Earl Lavender, and looked most intently in the direction of the outcry. Its fixed and savage gaze drew from Lord Brumm a still more horrid cry, and the ape, in all likelihood, thinking itself challenged by a more redoubted champion than the foes it had already mastered, flung Earl Lavender aside, and sprang at one leap on Lord Brumm, who immediately fainted away. Earl Lavender and Rorison, breathless, but little injured, picked themselves up, broke each a branch from a tree, and hastened to the attack. So wily was the ape, and so rapid its actions, that by the time its enemies had covered the few yards between it and them, it sat embattled on the unconscious Lord Brumm, with its back against an oak and both arms ready for the fray.

'Strike its hands,' said Earl Lavender, and at the word he and Rorison brought down their sticks with all their might, but without effect, for the ape caught them in its vicious grasp, pulled the men within its reach, and grappled them both. The three fell to the ground, and rolled over and over, the ape snarling and spitting, and the men grunting and grinding their teeth, in a catherine-wheel of arms and legs.

In the midst of this scrimmage there entered on the scene with much outcry about two dozen men and boys. He who seemed the leader of the band carried a gun, another was armed with a whip, a third with a lasso, and the rest had sticks.

'Keep as still as you can,' shouted the leader; and the man with the lasso advanced a step in front of the crowd. He had hardly prepared his cast, however, when a little figure dashed at the combatants, and plunging a long knife twice into the tumbling group, was about to escape into the forest. But the lasso, intended for the ape, caught the assassin round the neck, and he was

pulled to the ground half-choked and spluttering some jargon in which the word 're-vench' was alone intelligible.

'You rascal!' cried the leader of the band; 'you have killed him.'

'He lose me my situacion,' said the prisoner, endeavouring to free his throat from the constriction of the lasso. 'I re-vench myself. I s'all drop like ze dew from ze gallous on ze lion's mane, but I care not for 'im. I 'afe a lesson taught zat ze broud arishtocrad in his reminiscence s'all lay to heart as ze hens lays eggs for years to come. He lose me my situacion; I lose him his life.'

'What rubbish is this?' exclaimed the leader. 'He never was in any show but mine. What the devil did you mean by killing him? Your situation? Whose monkey were you? By Jove, I'll dress you in poor old Rang-tang's skin, and stick you in his cage! You'd pass for a monkey any day, and a beastly ugly one too.'

'Rang-tang!' cried the waiter, who has doubtless been recognised. 'What! 'afe I—'

ah! He is zen alive still. Heh! heh! I vas dwo precocious. He s'all yet hum in ze mill-vheel for stealing ze cab, and zen I s'all kill 'im again. How vas it zat I enjoyed sticking ze rang-tang wen it vas not 'im. All cats, zay say, grow grey in ze dark.'

The showman, paying no heed to the waiter's last remarks, endeavoured to stanch the wounds of the ape which lay on its face bleeding to death ; while Earl Lavender and Rorison, all scratched, and with the clothes torn from their backs, stood beside each other recovering their breath and their senses.

Then as soon as Earl Lavender realised the presence of an audience, he ascended the little eminence on which the ape had lately sat with Rorison for a cushion, and, turning now to one side now to the other, addressed the crowd with all the arts of an orator.

'Gentlemen,' he said, 'the persistence with which Evolution provides opportunities for the display of my fitness, and audiences

for the reception of the new doctrine, inspires me with an enthusiasm in this great cause, which I am certain will carry me even further than I have already gone. But in the meantime I wish to call your attention to a discovery I have made, a discovery so remarkable that it ranks second in importance to that which is beyond a doubt the greatest of any country and any age, the autodiscovery of myself. Gentlemen, that remarkable Scotchman there in a kilt, Mr Rorison namely, and that dying ourang-outang together form the missing link. When I first beheld them, from their relative positions I imagined that they were actually connected by some ligament, but I was soon undeceived. Mr Rorison, the human half of the link, was in total ignorance of his own identity no longer ago than last night, and the ourang-outang, the bestial part, on show in a menagerie until this morning from what I can gather. But no sooner do I appear on my great mission than these two are brought together in the most extraordinary way, and I am impelled

to the place of their meeting by what can only be regarded as an Evolutionary miracle. Nor can the full wonder of this matter be properly conceived until I remind you how the man was brought out of Scotland, and the beast over land and sea all the way from the wilds of Borneo; the former expecting in all likelihood to end his days as an editor; the latter, intended by the agents Evolution employed to be a mere source of gain in a travelling show. But, gentlemen, they constituted the missing link; Evolution, therefore brought them together with a clash; and in the conflict, happily ended, between them and the fittest, in this great convulsion of Nature, as I may call it, the beast is finally overcome, and man triumphant. If you cannot understand this actually, then understand it symbolically. The time will come—'

But Earl Lavender's audience, at first amused and curious, having gradually and then quickly deserted him, he stopped speaking, and gave his attention also to that which now attracted everybody. The

ourang-outang, conscious of the approach of death, had tried to rise, but finding itself much too weak for such an effort, it had uttered a most mournful cry, turning at the same time a beseeching look on its master. The showman, much moved, lifted the ape's body and held it against his own, and the dying beast let its head fall on the man's breast. Its breath came short and quick. It half raised its arms as if to embrace its master, but its strength was quite gone. Now and again it looked round with a dark despairing glance out of its human-like brown eyes. At last its head dropped forward, and it seemed as if it would never move again. Not a sound came from the crowd, and the whole forest was unusually still. The sun shone out of a clear blue sky; a soft wind touched the leaves here and there; it was a pleasant hour to die in. Suddenly there rose into the air a long shrill call, whether of a beast or a bird no one present knew. The intensity of the note thrilled everyone, and the ape was seen to quiver from head to foot. When the prolonged sound had died

away, it sat up with a spasmodic motion and looked eagerly round. Then it raised its face to the skies. 'Wa! wa!' it cried, and fell dead against its master.

CHAPTER X

HOW THEY ALL FOREGATHERED IN EPPING FOREST

THE showman, having deposited the ape's body decently on the ground, rose with a sigh and addressed himself to the waiter, who although released from the lasso was still held a prisoner.

'I wouldn't have taken five hundred—I wouldn't have taken a thousand pounds for poor old Rang-tang,' he said. 'He was the only one in England. What did you mean by killing him? He had done you no harm.'

'I vish not to kill him,' replied the waiter.

'Then what in God's name did you mean?'

'Noth-ing.'

'I'll sue you,' said the showman. 'I'm not going to loose a thousand pounds in this way. What are you? Who are you?'

The waiter making no reply to these questions, Earl Lavender answered for him.

'He is,' he said, 'a special agent of Evolution. Last night he lent material aid in a demonstration of my fitness, and he has to-day been employed as you all have seen in a most important service.' 'Whether he is a conscious agent or not I do not know.'

'An agent!' exclaimed the showman. 'Evolution! You seem all to be mad. Who and what are *you* next?'

But Earl Lavender, suddenly remembering the condition in which Lord Brumm had been left, turned abruptly from the showman, and running to the tree under which the ourang-outang had deposited his henchman, knelt down beside him.

'My good Brumm,' he cried, 'my good Brumm.'

Lord Brumm, who was slowly coming to himself, opened his eyes at the sound of his chief's voice and sat up.

‘Am I dead or alive?’ he asked plaintively.

‘Alive and unscathed,’ replied Earl Lavender, helping him to his legs.

Lord Brumm felt himself tenderly all over, more especially examining his ribs.

‘Nothing broken, I hope?’ said Earl Lavender.

‘Nothing,’ replied Lord Brumm thoughtfully. ‘Nothing ; but I have now become a misanthropist as well as a misogynist.’

Without another word he turned on his heel and walked towards one of the paths by which the crowd had entered the glade.

‘Where are you going?’ asked Earl Lavender.

‘Anywhere,’ replied Lord Brumm, turning defiantly. ‘I hate women ; I hate men. I have never all my life been on intimate terms with anyone who has not tried to use me for his or her own ends. My good nature always yields, and things go so far, that in order to recover my independence a rupture is regularly required. I break with you now, sir. I break with the whole

world for good and all. You and your demonstrations! Was it not enough to be whipped by a muscular young hussy in—hell, for all I know? But to have bagpipes thrown at me, and to be sat upon by monkeys. That is the last straw.'

Earl Lavender had listened with some astonishment to the opening of Lord Brumm's speech, but he had quite recovered that equanimity for which he was so remarkable before his recalcitrant henchman had made an end of repudiating all the ways of men.

'Well, good-bye,' he said, waving his hand, and then, addressing the crowd:—'Honest folk, I invite you all to breakfast with me, and thereafter to attend the funeral of the bestial part of the Missing Link. I saw on the outskirts of the forest as I came along a comfortable-looking old inn where I daresay accommodation can be found for us all.'

'Lunch, you mean, sir, I suppose?'

said a man in the crowd.

'For you it may be,' replied Earl Lavender.

‘For me it is breakfast, as I have not yet eaten to-day, and am quite famished.’

Lord Brumm, hearing word of food, for want of which he was like to faint again, slackened his steps, stood still, and then slowly crept back to the neighbourhood of his chief; a manœuvre which Earl Lavender observed, but took no notice of; he had, indeed, anticipated it.

‘Sir,’ said the showman in reply to Earl Lavender’s invitation, ‘I accept for myself and my men, and thank you kindly.’

‘We all accept,’ cried the crowd, every man and boy of them.

‘You shall all be welcome,’ rejoined Earl Lavender regally. ‘But we must proceed ceremoniously. This is a great historical occasion. We shall make a bier on which to carry the deceased part of the Missing Link, and the surviving part shall pace before it blowing a dirge.’

Rorison, who had gathered up his pipes, assented with a grim smile; the corpse of the ourang-outang was laid on some interwoven branches, and the procession moved

through the forest with all decorum. The piper went first playing the pibroch of Donuil Dhu; then came four men carrying the bier, immediately behind which walked Earl Lavender and the showman; a yard or two after them the crowd followed, headed by Lord Brumm.

His mind divided between regret for the loss of his ape, and curiosity as to who and what Earl Lavender might be, the showman gave but little heed to the discourse of his companion, and took the opportunity of his first pause to inquire who he was.

‘I am the Earl of Lavender,’ was the reply, ‘and my friend is Lord Brumm. We are inaugurating a new era in the history of the world. In taverns and forests we give illustrations of the survival of the fittest, and expound our creed. Our success is constant; you yourself have seen how the Missing Link dropped into our mouths as it were.’

The showman, a good-natured, conceited young fellow, quite unable to comprehend

Earl Lavender's sincerity, and never doubting his perfect sanity, leapt at once to the conclusion that he had to do with two titled gentlemen out for a frolic. With easy confidence he entered into the spirit of the joke, and smiled and nodded approval at everything Earl Lavender said. When they arrived at the inn he took the landlord aside, and admonished him as to who his principal guests were. While the showman talked with the landlord, Earl Lavender, halting a few paces from the door, summoned Lord Brumm to his side, and bade him contemplate the inn.

'Is it not a charming old house?' he said; 'with its heavy thatch, its cream-coloured walls, and low, broad windows? But look at the sign, good Brumm; look at the sign!'

On one side of a swinging board a red shape, clearly intended for a bird, sat under a thing which might have been either a scythe or a gallows. The other side of the sign translated this cryptoglyph.

'The "Razor and Hen,"' said Lord

Brumm, well-pleased to be restored to favour without any parley; 'a very odd sign.'

'It is, indeed,' rejoined Earl Lavender. 'And I confess that I am puzzled. Beyond a doubt it contains some message for me; but what, is more than I can tell. Can you interpret it?'

'The "Razor and Hen,"' repeated Lord Brumm, looking very wise and feeling very hungry. 'It will be necessary to analyse it.'

'Very good, indeed,' said Earl Lavender.

'The hen,' continued Lord Brumm, with a tremendous mental effort, 'is a domestic fowl, and the razor is a domestic implement.'

'Yes?'

But Lord Brumm was already at a loss, and stood rubbing his chin in an attempt to throw light on the subject of the sign, when the showman brought up the landlord to receive Earl Lavender's order.

'Oh!' said Earl Lavender, 'can you accommodate us all in one room?'

The innkeeper had a barn where in wet

weather he entertained pleasure parties of school children, etc.

‘But,’ he remarked deprecatingly, ‘I can hardly ask your lordship to go there.’

‘Oh, yes, you can,’ rejoined Earl Lavender. ‘Count how many there are.’

The innkeeper counted thirty, and Earl Lavender bade him prepare lunch for that number.

‘But I am quite unprepared, my lord, for so many,’ said the innkeeper.

‘There are bakers and butchers in Walthamstow,’ rejoined Earl Lavender. ‘Send for whatever you need, and let it be a lordly feast. In the meantime, Lord Brumm and I having had no breakfast will eat whatever you can give us.’

‘The responsibility,’ began the innkeeper hesitatingly, but his irresolution vanished when he looked squarely at Earl Lavender’s handsome, frank face, and remembered that he had two live lords to deal with. ‘Very well, your lordship,’ he said.

‘Now, we must get some clothes,’ added

Earl Lavender. 'We are in rags, Lord Brumm and myself; can you get us clothes?'

'Well, my lord, I haven't anything that would fit you, but I can get some from a ready-made shop in Walthamstow.'

'What do you say, Brumm?' asked Earl Lavender. 'Shall we have ready-made clothes?'

'Certainly,' cried Lord Brumm, reckless with hunger and misery. 'And bring watches. We have no watches.'

'You hear?' said Earl Lavender. 'You are to get from Walthamstow samples of ready-made clothing and watches for our approval.'

The innkeeper again hesitated, but the showman winked to him that it was all right.

'Very well, my lord,' he said. 'Chops shall be ready for your lordships in ten minutes, and I will be ready to begin to lunch the company in an hour.'

'And now,' said Earl Lavender, when a messenger had been despatched to Walt-

hamstow, and the innkeeper had gone, still with some hesitation, about his business, 'we must prepare to bury the bestial part of the Missing Link.'

'My lord,' rejoined the showman, who thought the time for his business had come at last, 'I shall be glad to sell you Rangat's corpse for five hundred pounds.'

'Sell it?' exclaimed Earl Lavender.

'Yes, my lord. I cannot afford to bury him for nothing.'

'But it will not cost you anything. With the help of a pick and spade we can bury him in the forest.'

'But he's worth money to me, my lord. Stuffed he would make a good advertisement outside; or I could sell him to a museum.'

'Nonsense! He must be buried out of sight and out of mind. I require it.'

'Oh, ho!' cried the showman. 'Perhaps you will be kind enough to bury your own property.'

Before Earl Lavender could reply, the innkeeper, who had returned to resolve

one last doubt, still feeling uneasy about the anomalous orders he had received, thrust out his hand and said bluntly,—

‘My lord, I don’t know you, and never heard of you. I shall be obliged to you for five pounds to account.’

‘My good man,’ said Earl Lavender, ‘I never pay for anything.’

The innkeeper turned pale and his jaw fell. Then without even wasting an oath on Earl Lavender, he set off at the top of his speed to countermand in person the orders that had been despatched to Walthamstow.

‘What the devil are you, and what the blasted nuisance do you mean?’ cried the showman.

‘Friend,’ replied Earl Lavender gravely, ‘I am he who shall put an end to all expletives and exhibitions of temper. You must know that I am the fittest of human beings, and that I have come forth to convert people to Evolution. I mean to show the world that, appetites being provided, food and drink must be forthcoming; and

that, granted bodies which cannot endure exposure, clothes are imperative. I wish to indicate my right, and the right of everybody, to the necessities of existence. Work? Yes, for every man when it can be had; but food and clothes and fire for every man, woman and child exist, and must be distributed. This is a new aspect of Evolution suggested to me by my own hunger, which is at present intolerable, as I have tasted nothing since eleven o'clock last night.

Lord Brumm groaned.

'Very fine, indeed,' said the showman.
'And what about our lunch?'

This was the signal for an outburst on the part of the crowd. Men and boys hooted and yelled for fully two minutes; and when the clamour subsided the ill-feeling against Earl Lavender and Lord Brumm became articulate.

'They're no better than they should be,' said one voice.

'Oss thieves,' said another.

'Seen 'em at Barnet,' cried a third,

‘ makin’ believe to sell knives and purses.’

‘ Duck ’em in the pond ! ’

‘ They ain’t no dooks, not them.’

‘ Only earls ! ’

‘ No pride about them ! ’

Uttering these and other remarks unquotable, the disappointed crowd began to hustle Earl Lavender and Lord Brumm with toe-treadings, pushes, and elbow-thrusts.

‘ He stole a cab,’ cried the waiter, who had been held a prisoner hitherto, but had regained his liberty in the tumult. ‘ Of him I ’afe to zay that he iss thief, zat he talk, talk, talk ze golt off ze gingerbread, and iss ze most unhung villain.’

‘ Steal a cab ! ’ exclaimed the showman. ‘ Common thieves ! Why, then, they stole Rang-tang, and the poor fellow didn’t stray after all. Lend a hand here.’

In spite of Earl Lavender’s struggles and Lord Brumm’s whimperings the Evolutionists were both speedily pinioned, while the waiter tripped round them in a frenzy of gratified malice.

'Now then, Signor Maccaroni,' said the showman to the waiter, 'let's hear your charge.'

'Ah!' said the waiter, stopping his dance, 'I charge zem vis night-robbery and a cab. In ze Café Benvenuto I vait; I qvarrel vis everybody. My temper loses my head ven I zee ozzer waiters smile and smile and smile and stuff zer bogkets vis inzolens and tips. I take no inzolens, I take no tips; I 'afe no custom but ven zer is no ozzer tabble. I swear, I mutter, I gif not satisfaction. Beople gomplaing. One, dwo, trice I am varned; if a vourth time I qvarrel, go I musd. Ze Café Benvenuto is my sixt blace in Lonton; I am known; insteat of my vortune I make debts. I can get noth-ing. My life is spoiled. Understandt; I came to zis lant of awvul for my vortune—in six year, I said. I 'afe been six month; I 'afe six blace; I 'afe six pounds of debt. It vas my last chance. I stroggle, stroggle, stroggle myself to behafe. I fail drice dimes. Zen I fight myself; I vin ze

battle of myself for vun month. Zen come he and he zit at my tabble, zupper, and 'afe no money. *Zey* make ze qvarrel, but ze qvarrel vas vis *me*, and I am lost to my blace. I zay to myself, "Revench!" zey 'afe stolen my vortune, for I cannot now vait more. Zis morning inconzolably I buy a knife. I say to myself at my vintow of my room, "I vait"—Heh! heh!—Ah, yes, I vait in Piccadowndilly, and on his ribs blunt my edge. Zen I zee him on a cab. "He comes to be killed," I say, and out vly. A cabsman tells me he stole a cab. Ve run, ve miss, ve vind, ve lose; but ze cabsman catch his cab in a vield and go home; I catch ze thief in ze vorest, and kill a rang-tang.'

'Truly,' said Earl Lavender, who had listened with intense interest, 'here is an irrefutable proof of the truth of Evolution, and of the validity of my claim to be the fittest. When my life is in danger, behold the Missing Link is offered up in my room.'

'I am afraid,' said the showman, addressing Earl Lavender, 'I owe you an apology.

If you drove out here now in a cab you can't have stolen my monkey. But all you do and say is so outrageous, that I'm hanged if I don't think I ought to take you to the police station. What do you say to the waiter's charge?'

'I have not the least doubt that every word of it is true,' replied Earl Lavender. 'But I must point out to you that the charge is against himself, not me. He accuses himself of attempting manslaughter, me of nothing the law can possibly cognize.'

'True,' said the showman.

'Recognize!' cried the waiter mistaking. 'I recognize him anywhere. He steal, he lie, hear him not. *Bonne mère*. I recognize ze tip of his elsbow, a hair of his head. I know him.'

'What am I to do?' asked the showman.

'Nothing,' replied Earl Lavender. 'Stand by, and you will see Evolution deliver us out of your hands.'

Rorison, who had remained unobserved on the outskirts of the crowd, advanced to the central group at this crisis. He was about

to speak but a great shout of laughter greeted him. His disordered Highland dress had not seemed so very ludicrous when he marched in front of the funeral procession blowing a pibroch. Now, however, his function being ended, his uncouth looks, and disarrayed philibeg caused, not inopportunately, a mirthful diversion. The crowd recovered its good nature, and after a few sallies of advice to 'tuck up his petticoat,' of nonchalant invitation to 'tip us the Highland Fling,' of pathetic inquiry as to 'where he had been a' the day, bonnie laddie, 'Eeland laddie,' Rorison was accorded quiet attention.

'Unpinion these gentlemen,' he said gravely.

Inquiring looks were bent on the showman, but he had nothing to say.

'Unpinion them,' repeated Rorison with increased gravity,

After a little hesitation he was obeyed.

'I told you,' said Earl Lavender triumphantly to the showman. 'Nor could there be a fitter agent of my release than the surviving part of the Missing Link.'

'Now,' resumed the Scot, 'beer and bread and cheese will be served in the barn for all who want them. 'You,' including with a gesture Earl Lavender, Lord Brumm, and the showman, 'will breakfast with me.'

Without more ado Rorison led the way to the 'Razor and Hen.' At his instructions the barn was thrown open and the homely feast provided for the public company, while he and his private guests sat down to a smoking dish of chops and kidneys in a low-ceiled room with a great fireplace. Earl Lavender and Lord Brumm devoured several platefuls in silence, and were still busily eating after the other two had satisfied their hunger.

'I would give,' said the showman, 'I would give a lot to know what the meaning of all this is.'

'Ah,' said Rorison, 'that nobody can tell you, not even Earl Lavender himself.'

'I question that,' said Earl Lavender. 'In the meantime—some more chops, Brumm. But about yourself, Mr Rorison? I beg you will tell us this great adventure of yours. Last night you seemed to be a dusty literary

man; to-day you are a wild cateran, kern, and gallowglass. How comes it?’

‘It will please me to tell you,’ replied Rorison. ‘I *am* a dusty literary man, and make an insufficient and insecure income by reviewing. There are perhaps only two books published in a year on which I could write with satisfaction at any length, and I have to turn out swathes of stuff—columns, when I could have said all I wanted to say in a sentence. This I have endured for three years; there seemed nothing else for it but suicide. How I came into this predicament—to submit to this alternative, I may not tell you. But last night the sight of you and your beautiful adventurousness set my brains working, and in the early morning I donned my Highland costume, took my bagpipes, and set off on foot for Scotland.’

‘Were you originally a piper, then?’ asked Earl Lavender.

‘Oh, no! Every Scotchman has a Highland dress and a set of bagpipes. Did you not know that?’

‘I was not aware.’

‘Very few of them will admit it, I dare say; they even try to conceal it from each other; but in some cupboard or corner every Scot keeps a kilt, a dirk and a chanter. Well, I had in an old purse five sovereigns saved up to buy a coffin, should I die suddenly. I put these in my sporran—hoping that I should not require to spend them, but having them in the last resort—and started to tramp to Scotland. I missed the Great North Road at Highgate; but, walking along in the right direction as I thought, and being in a ruminant mood, and having besides the worst head in the world for locality, I didn’t notice my whereabouts until I found myself on the borders of Epping Forest, miles out of the way. That didn’t put me much about, however; in fact, I soon began to see in my divagation, a sort of what certain people would call providential something—’

‘Call it Evolutionary.’

‘Ah, yes, I recognised an Evolutionary something or other, and determined, as my home in Scotland had been on the border

of Cadzow Forest, to make a fresh start from Epping Forest, and so journey from wood to wood. As I had not touched the pipes for three years, and have but little skill, I selected the retired nook in which you found me so strangely situated to practise a little before my first public appearance; for it is my intention to live on the road by my music. I had no sooner started a reel than I was attracted by a strange motion in the top of a pollard-hornbeam, and my drone ceased with a broken squeak, when I perceived an immense ape sit up on its hind quarters and regard me intently. I had heard of wolves in Epping Forest but never of monkeys, and concluded, of course, that the beast had escaped from a menagerie. Remembering stories of wild animals subdued by music, and thinking also that the skirl of the bagpipes would be certain to attract those who were doubtless searching for the runaway, I resumed the reel, though with trembling fingers. The ourang-outang bent its head on one side and looked at me with a quaint expression as much as to

say,—“Ay, man, and that’s the way you do it.” Then it leapt from the tree head first and came towards me on all fours. I continued playing, although breathless with anticipation of what the ape would do. It came quite close, sat up and watched me for, I think, nearly five minutes, then, with a scream, and the rapidity of an explosion, it seized the pipes in its forepaws and me in its hind ones, and seated itself as you found it. Panting and frightened, I was at first unable to do anything. When I did find breath and courage to make a motion, the brute gripped the calves of my legs so fiercely that I yelled with pain, and my efforts in my own behalf were reduced to crying out in the hope of attracting attention. It seemed to me when you came to my deliverance that the ape had been sitting upon me for a whole day, although it can’t have been more than half an hour.’

‘I wonder it didn’t turn your hair white,’ said Lord Brumm sympathetically.

‘Ah, yes,’ said Earl Lavender, ‘I forgot you were sat on too—and fainted.’

Brumm nodded his head, sighed, and thought of a reply, but, before he could hit on one, there entered the room the innkeeper, flushed and staring, and carrying a big parcel, followed by Mrs Scamler and the young lady of the Great British Hotel.

‘Well, there you are at last,’ cried Mrs Scamler, smiling and conjuring with her eyeglasses. ‘It’s a mercy to see you alive; it’s a mercy to see you in health; it’s a mercy we little expected to see when you slipped from our presence by stealth.’

Mrs Scamler turned pale, looked about her in alarm, and dropped into a chair.

‘Lord bless me!’ she continued. ‘Is it—have I—my dear, was that poetry just now?’

It’s a mercy to see you alive,
It’s a mercy to see—

No!—ha, ha!—he!—I believe it was poetry. No one ever can tell what may come popping into their heads. That’s the first poetry I ever made, and perhaps it will be the last; but I understand it now. I always wondered how they did it; now I

know they didn't do it. Lord, now! There it's again! It only needs a start, you see.

I always wondered how they did it,
Now I know they didn't do it.

That's what they call blank verse, I suppose, my dear, and it comes out of you. You don't make it; but you're excited, half laughing and half crying, and you open your lips or take up your pen and the poetry flows. Now, if I had given up the time I spent on the study of the French language and model drawing to the writing of poetry I might have been famous by this time. But it *is* a mercy to see you alive after fighting that dreadful beast, and enjoying your lunch, too, as happy and unconcerned as schoolboys. Oh, you wicked boys! —truants!—truants! You know, we lost you in that long-winded place Walthamstow, and drove and walked here and there and everywhere, and went to a tea shop to rest; and while we were sitting there a man came in and ordered two dozen loaves, and then Mr Landlord came in and revoked the order,

and told his man that they were mad, and explained to the shopkeeper that two lunatics had escaped from Colney Hatch, and came to the Forest and killed a monkey, and ordered lunch for thirty with no money to pay, and watches and clothes, and his man hadn't been to the watchmaker, or the butcher, or the clothier yet; so Maud—oh, I know your young lady's name, now, sir—Maud and I looked at each other, and I whispered "them?" and she nodded her head, and I described you to the landlord, and he said it was you, and we brought clothes when we learned how ragged you were, and we're going to pay for everything, and go back to London by train as soon's you're ready.'

'Evolution fulfils itself in many ways,' said Earl Lavender.

'What shall I do?' moaned Lord Brumm.

'Can you give me a needle and thread?' asked Rorison of the landlord.

Mrs Scamler, noticing Rorison for the first time, exclaimed and muttered, and then burst out,—

‘I can’t help it, but I must see you nearer. I never was under the same roof with a kilt before. And you have bagpipes too. What a very interesting and delightful person you must be.’

During these remarks Mrs Scamler had taken a seat beside Rorison who looked at her askance and somewhat sheepishly.

‘Do you like it now—really?’ asked Mrs Scamler with her head on one side.

‘It’s torn,’ replied Rorison, somewhat incontinently, as he crouched into the corner.

‘Oh!’ returned Mrs Scamler; ‘were you in the fight too?’

At that moment the innkeeper, who had gone in search of Rorison’s requirements, returned with a needle and thread.

‘Show me to another room, please,’ said Rorison.

‘You don’t mean to say you’re going to sew your kilt yourself?’ cried Mrs Scamler. ‘Nonsense! Give me the needle and thread, Mr Landlord. And the best thing that you gentlemen can do is to take that parcel of clothes and change yourselves. There’s six

suits to choose from, and Mr—Mr Highlandman, you can choose one too, if you like, but you must send your kilt to me to sew. Now, isn't that the best plan, my dear?'

The young lady admitted it was, and so did Earl Lavender and Lord Brumm. As for Rorison, he would probably have preferred to sew his own kilt, but rather than argue out the matter with the possessor of such an uncontrollable and tireless tongue as Mrs Scamler's, he withdrew with the others, and sent in his philibeg by the landlord. After examining it with great interest, Mrs Scamler hung it round her own ample haunches and made a turn of the room with the bagpipes under her arm. She even essayed to blow, but the sudden harsh buzz of the pipes behind her so took her by surprise that she flung them from her and settled down at last to repair a rent which had been made in the tartan by the ourang-outang's teeth during the final *mêlée*.

'Maud, dear,' she said, 'you ought to

watch at the door that they don't run off again.'

Maud did so, heaving many a heavy sigh.

CHAPTER XI

OF THE 'RAZOR AND HEN,' AND HOW THEY
DANCED ON THE GREEN

EARL LAVENDER and Lord Brumm did intend to run away again. Having changed their clothes, they walked as lightly as they could along the lobby that led to the door of the inn, but Mrs Scamler, seeing them pass, cried out,—

‘Ah, my dear Mr Gurdon, come in, come in!’

Lord Brumm groaned and slunk into the room, but Earl Lavender, supposing that his ‘young lady’ was with Mrs Scamler, made a dash for it, only, of course, to drop into Maud’s arms. She, indeed, was nearly overset, and had to cling to him to keep from falling.

‘Oh, Harry!’ she cried, clasping an arm of his with both hers, ‘what is it? What is it?’

He grew pale, and said with forced coldness,—

‘Now, Maud, you would be much wiser not to invite a discussion. You will only make yourself miserable.’

‘Miserable! As if I could be more miserable than I have been all this week. Oh!’ she whispered, gulping a legion of sobs, while the tears poured down her face.

Earl Lavender blushed a fiery red, then turned even paler than before.

‘Maud,’ he said, speaking low and thick, ‘Maud, I will tell you all, but you must not laugh at me.’

‘Laugh!’ she replied, with some scorn in her broken voice.

‘Yes, laugh,’ he rejoined. ‘A prophet has no honour among his friends. Prepare yourself for a revelation, and whatever you think of it do not, as you love me, laugh. I can bear—I can welcome the laughter of anybody except you—and one other.’

‘One other?’ she queried, with a start.

‘Yes,’ he assented. ‘Only one other.’

‘What other?’

‘The fittest of women.’

‘Oh, me! What is it?’ she whispered, and her tears fell afresh.

‘You mustn’t cry,’ he answered gently.

‘Let us go under a tree.’

Beneath the shade of a hawthorn they sat down side by side. The larks shouted high overhead, and in the wood behind a great chorus of birds sang joyfully. A soft wind swayed the shadows on the grass, and now and then a fleecy cloud veiled the midsummer sun.

‘What,’ cried Earl Lavender, looking about him, ‘what a beautiful day, and what a beautiful place! I could enjoy a retired life so thoroughly. Why is this mission thrust on me? Why *am* I the fittest of men?’

Deeply perplexed, and with tearful eyes, Maud took one of his hands in both hers, and then in tones that she vainly endeavoured to steady, said,—

‘Oh Harry, do stop this nonsense, and tell me what it is that’s wrong?’

She paused for a second or two suspending her breath, and then added, as she dropped his hand,—

‘Who is this—other—the fittest of women?’

‘I do not know yet,’ replied Earl Lavender.

‘But you spoke of her just now.’

‘Yes; for she must exist. I thought I had found her last night, but I was mistaken. It is she I am in search of; it is part of my mission.’

‘Are you mad, Harry?’

‘It is little use my talking to you, Maud, unless you empty your mind of all preconception, and, giving me a willing ear, invite conviction.’

‘Well, dear, tell me,’ she said, appearing as submissive as she could, ‘how are you to find out the fittest among women?’

‘By Natural Selection; that is the phrase, I think.’

‘By Natural Selection!’

‘I must devise some means of gathering out of all the countries of the world—all Aryan countries I mean—or—who knows?—perhaps I am to discover that true beauty, true fitness—in the female, that is—may be found only in one of the barbarous African tribes, or among the everlasting races of Asia. It will be advisable, therefore, to have delegates from all peoples. Fifty Russian ladies, say; no French—an effete race; thirty Germans; a dozen Romans—from that little town on the Tiber: I forget its name, where the Latin race is said to survive in its purity; a score of Norwegians; a hundred Chinese; a hundred Africans—assorted; and so on. The hotels about Charing Cross could be hired for their reception, and out of the mass I could choose say a hundred of the best-favoured, the others being sent home—without prejudice. In two years, you see, I could live a week with each of these—if that were necessary; but in all likelihood it would not take me half—a quarter of that time to find the fittest. Here it

seems to me you have a very fair scheme of Natural Selection.'

'Very fair, indeed,' said Maud mechanically, looking out at nothing with a stony stare and pale, wet cheeks.

'Then we understand each other, my dear,' rejoined Earl Lavender.

'I understand nothing about it.'

'Oh, you will in time. I must return to London now, having to prepare for a remarkable demonstration to-morrow which will eclipse anything I have yet done.'

'But what about me?' exclaimed Maud, passionate and indignant.

'You? Well, I suppose you can come with me—in the meantime.'

'In the meantime?'

Much to Earl Lavender's relief, their talk was interrupted at this point by the sudden appearance of Lord Brumm and Mrs Scamler, who came out of the inn together and ran towards them hand-in-hand, Mrs Scamler skipping like a girl and as radiant as a bride. Lord Brumm, however, looked very shamefaced, and

evidently overcome with difficulty a desire to hide behind the buxom widow.

'My dearest people,' said Mrs Scamler, plumping down on the grass beside the others and dragging Lord Brumm along with her, 'it's all right! I've got the whole story, and it was just as I said, the malevoling interference of a deputation, partly, only partly, for, oh, you dear Mr Gurdon! there was another reason, most honourable, most honourable. You must know, my lord, or whatever you are, for I know you're not, I've told Maud already how on the very eve of our marriage he ran away, for pleasures are like poppies spread, you see the flower, the bloom is shed, as saith the poet. Well, he'd hardly been half an hour in the hotel where he went to, you remember, so as not to be in the same house, when up came an anonymous letter with a blue-tailed envelope, sealed with a door key, and written upside down, I mean sloping the wrong way, in a feigned hand, although it's got very common now to slope the wrong way, and sloping is a wrong thing to do certainly in any case,

Mr Gurdon had a good excuse — very crooked and illegitimate you said it was, Mr Gurdon—and it told him all about my advertisements, and about the men who came down to marry me in buggies and traps with whisky bottles in their pockets, and red noses, all smelling of bad cigars and bird's-eye tobacco. It told him how I had gone in wholesale for the French language, and that I was a most dangerous character, full of the French Revulsion and *fang-de-seeaycle*. Do you know French, my lord, or, Mr whatever you are? 'F' 'i' 'n'—they called it '*fang*,' you know, that's how they pronounce it; and it's very strange, and no wonder ignorant people *are* suspicious. Well, it struck him all of a heap, and he sent for the messenger, but the boy, oh, where was he?—I did laugh at that once: I heard two *gammons*—that's what they call city Arabs in French, and a very good name too—gammoning about it, and the one said,—“The boy stood on the burning deck,” and the other said,—“covered

with blisters," and I stood at the shop window and laughed in the street—Holborn it was, and very comical indeed. But the boy, whether he was covered with blisters or not, he ought to have been, couldn't be found; and so he sat in blank despair chewing the letter until he thought of going into the bar and putting questions.'

'But, my dear, I didn't chew the letter,' said Mr Gurdon.

'That is the way I tell the story,' retorted Mrs Scamler. 'Do you suppose it would have the least interest for anybody as you told it to me—leastways if they hadn't the power of putting two and two together as I have; yes, indeed, and making five of it. Then the barman, a very civil man, I can say, and one that must tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, ratified the letter every word of it, and a woman came in for beer, a drunken trollop that had been my servant once, Sally Dwindlepeak her name was, I

remember, but what she married, or if she married, I don't know. She used two and a half pounds of butter and three pounds of sugar a week to her own share, until I put her on commons, and short ones, too, and had to have water poured over her in the morning to waken her—a dirty, lazy cat, with Tommy this and Tommy that forever running after her. Well, she put in her word it seems, and says,—“An old close-fisted chattering Judy that Mrs Scamler is.”’

‘My dear, she didn't say that,’ protested Mr Gurdon.

‘Didn't she, though? I know Sally, and if it wasn't that it was something worse! “She talks and talks *to* you,” she says, “all forenoon, and keeps you from your work, and then talks and talks *at* you all afternoon for being idle. Such a tongue I never did hear,” which wasn't all a lie, I do admit; but if she said I didn't give her a good written character, don't you believe her, more

than she deserved. And now I remember she married Tom Strammel, but not out of my house, and had triplets, and the very last that should—"Goodness and mercy," cried Mr Gurdon. Now, don't interrupt, my dear!—or would have done—there!—if it had been his mark of exclamation, "talked at you all day, did she?" and without another word he put on his hat and coat and went away, late as it was, without paying his bill, and has never been seen since till this morning in the "Cap-and-Bells," when I fell on the floor, which the sawdust is about me still. My lord, or mister, you will wonder why Mr Gurdon went away so precipitously, and so I'll tell you that he is a mahoganist of the deepest dye, and had been lured on to marriage by me pretending that I was as silent as death, and as docile as a tame rabbit. Poor, dear gentleman, he has been brought to the brink of the grave twice by scouring wives with yelping tongues, and when he learned beyond

a doubt that I was the most wonderful conversationalist in all Nettleby-Kingscroft, and a woman as can't abide a speck here and there or anywhere, instead of the quiet, smiling little mouse he knew, pouring out his tea with a hole in her stocking and a smudge on her brow—ha, ha, ha!—he cut and run there and then, although, mind you, he was playing a deep little game too. Ah, Mr Gurdon, Mr Gurdon, we were a pair of tricksters, weren't we? Do you know, my dear, he has just told me that the reason he made up his mind to marry me was because all the money left him by his two wives was lost in these bank failures, and he wanted me for my income. There, would you have anything to do with a man like that?'

Maud couldn't say for certain.

'Ah! but he had not really lost everything, his honour as a mahoganist remained. You see, although he could marry me and have a comfortable home for ever and a day, the deep principle of mahoganry, out-

raged at finding me the same kind of woman he had buried two of — you might have thought it a recommendation ; but no, he rose and ran, like Joseph's coat, with only a few pounds in his pocket, which were stolen next day. He's been destitute and miserable ever since, and yet he wouldn't come back. Therefore I declare him to be most honourable and worthy, for he did place something or other before mere comfort, though it was only fear of my tongue and my scouring ways. My dear Mr Gurdon, I shall make you the happiest of men.'

Lord Brumm, too overpowered to speak, cast a very dejected and rueful glance at Earl Lavender, who laughed aloud at the conclusion of Mrs Scamler's story, and wished her and her betrothed joy of each other heartily.

'And now for London,' he continued, getting to his feet. 'Back to the fray, good Brumm. This refreshing interlude has already lasted too long.'

'Ah!' cried Mrs Scamler, jumping up and clapping her hands, 'here comes Mr

Highlander with his pipes and the kilt I sewed.'

Running to Rorison, who had just stepped out of the inn, she asked him to play a reel, 'and we'll have a little dance,' she said, 'before we go.'

Nothing loth, Rorison tuned up 'Tullochgorum,' and Mrs Scamler invited Earl Lavender to trip it on the green.

'With all my heart, madam,' he replied. 'I am delighted with your frankness and the extraordinary power of surviving which you evidently possess. Lord Brumm, your baroness to be is distinctly fit.'

'And you can't say no fairer than that,' assented Mrs Scamler merrily, as she whirled away light as a bird, with flying skirts and firm feet.

Mr Gurdon and Maud, wretched as they were, found the example irresistible, and dashed into the dance, glad of the distraction. The sound of the pipes and of the whooping of Mrs Scamler, who spared neither lungs nor limbs, reached the thirty lunchers in their barn: each man looked

at his neighbour, finished his beer at a gulp, and made for the door. The servants came from the inn; young women and middle-aged women, mostly with bare heads and naked arms, appeared from nobody knew where; and soon at least fifty couples pranced upon the sod, many of them with but a crude idea of what they were doing, but all able and pleased to toss themselves about in time to the music.

When the mirth was at its highest Earl Lavender seized Maud by the arm and led her to the door of the inn. His action, frantic in its haste and suddenness, was observed by everybody. Rorison stopped playing, and the crowd followed the deserters in amazement.

In the midst of a dead silence, which everyone felt to be most impressive by contrast with the riot of the previous moment, Earl Lavender, pointing to the sign above the inn door, said to Maud,—

‘I cannot make it out; Lord Brumm cannot make it out. Can you tell me what it means?’

‘The “Razor and Hen,”’ panted Maud, breathless with the dance. ‘It’s just one of these old signs that have no meaning.’

‘Ah, no,’ rejoined Earl Lavender mournfully. ‘Nothing is without meaning. Can anyone tell me’—turning to the crowd—‘what is the significance of the “Razor and Hen?”’ I am Earl Lavender, the fittest of men. Me, all prophets have foretold; all poets, all preachers are my fore-runners. There is not a vein upon a leaf, not a scratch upon a pebble, not a name above a shop, not a torn word on a scrap of paper, without a message for me; and I am in despair because I cannot read the meaning here. The “Razor and Hen!”’

No one spoke. Mrs Scamler opened her mouth, but closed it again without a remark. Earl Lavender appealed mutely to Rorison. The Scot shook his head, as did the showman when he was referred to; but the waiter elbowed his way to the front, and thrusting his hands in his pockets, said in a formal voice, as if he had been announcing a recitation,—

‘Ze “Racesor—ant Hen.”’

‘Yes, my friend,’ said Earl Lavender expectantly.

‘Ze “Racesor—ant Hen,”’ repeated the waiter, coughing.

‘Well?’ said Earl Lavender with much solicitude.

‘It meance noth-ing,’ replied the waiter, scratching his head. ‘My head zought I had zomezing, but he pass away.’ Ze “Racesor ant Hen.” Heh, heh! How vun come to baint him, ah, who can tell! *Bonne mère!* Ze Angleesh are ze beoble abzurd.’

‘In the city,’ said Earl Lavender to Maud, ‘my faculties, relaxed by this excursion, will regain their strength, and I shall find the meaning.’

He shook hands with Rorison and the showman, and walked off to Wood Street Station, accompanied by Maud, and followed by Lord Brumm and Mrs Scamler, while the crowd set up a shout, and the waiter cried, ‘God zave ze Qveen!’

When Rorison inquired of the landlord

about the bill it appeared that Mrs Scamler and Maud had settled quietly for everything; and on quitting the showman to pursue his journey to Cadzow Forest he learned that the waiter had agreed to work in the menagerie for a while as some compensation for the slaughter of the ourang-outang.

‘Thus are earthly things made even,’ said Rorison to himself as he turned his face northwards, and passed out of this full and accurate narrative.

CHAPTER XII

HOW MRS SCAMLER THOUGHT SHE WAS DEAD ;
WITH OTHER MATTERS

ALL the way to London Earl Lavender considered in silence the mystery of the 'Razor and Hen.' It was easy enough to foist a significance upon this extraordinary sign, but he could evolve nothing that fitted both it and him ; so, on the arrival of the train at Liverpool Street, he gave the question up, promising himself to examine it exhaustively when his mind should be freer. Maud's presence troubled him ; the idea of his proposed march from St Paul's to Westminster and that of his new scheme of Natural Selection jostled each other in his head ; he must have patience

and submit to the Evolutionary will. He taxed himself with having endeavoured to rush things; and as if to make amends for his late headlong exploit he sat down on one of the seats on the platform, lit a cigar which he had bought from the 'Razor and Hen,' crossed his legs, and smiled at his companions.

'Lord bless me!' exclaimed Mrs Scamler. 'Well, of all the places to do the Duchy Farrinaty!—though I never did make out how that awful, hideous, roasted, old Italian in the lime-kiln in Dante's pictures could possibly make up such a proverb as "easy does it."'

'Will you not—come with us?' asked Maud hesitatingly.

She felt utterly powerless because she was most unwilling to form that opinion of Earl Lavender which his conduct was forcing on her. She and Mrs Scamler had arranged, if possible, to take both wanderers, in the first instance, to the Great British Railway Hotel, and then to their respective homes. It now became clear that they should not

have counted so securely as they had done on Earl Lavender's consent. 'As long as we keep by them they will go with us,' Mrs Scamler had said. Maud shrugged her shoulders as she recalled the remark. 'Yes,' she thought, 'as long as we can keep them we shall be with them.'

'No,' replied Earl Lavender, a minute having elapsed since Maud put her question, 'you will come with me. My mind is made up, or, rather, the immediate steps to be taken were evolved the moment I ceased to consider.'

He led the way promptly to the station-yard, and they all got into a four-wheeler.

'Trallidge's Hotel,' said Earl Lavender, and had to repeat the direction before the driver grasped it.

Lord Brumm turned pale, and seemed about to protest; but gradually his mouth tightened, and a grim smile began to play about his eyes. The ladies, lost in wonder, said nothing. Maud paid the driver when they got out. Lord Brumm chuckled nervously, and Mrs Scamler touched him

with her eye-glasses and chuckled too, vaguely sympathetic. In a few minutes they all stood in the cedar-floored room at the foot of the broad stair. Four stately men, and four stately women — not those of the preceding night, but another octave as grave and pleasant-looking—rose from the couches, laid aside their books, and, gathering their robes about them, received the visitors graciously though in silence. Earl Lavender whispered a few words to the four stately dames, who immediately approached Mrs Scamler and Maud and led them abashed and wondering to the women's apartments.

Earl Lavender and Lord Brumm were conducted as before to the bath. Having passed from hot water through snow to the *douche* of attar of roses, they were clad in the costume of the Underworld and taken to the Whipping Room. There, armed with whips, they reclined on couches beside the middle-aged men and women, whose grave presences preserved decorum. In a few seconds Maud and Mrs Scamler

entered the room. These ladies, fresh from a series of baths similar to the men's lustration, presented a dazzling appearance in the sight of their 'gentlemen.' Mrs Scamler, a beautiful damask in her cheeks, her mouth a crimson geranium, a soft and limpid light in her kindly eyes, and every hair of her head crisp and sparkling, looked like Maud's elder sister. And Maud! She stepped through the curtains of the door like the moon issuing from a cloud. Her face shone pale, radiant and warm, with the faintest shade of pink, that came and went in the light like the soft, clear colour in mother-of-pearl. Her breath seemed to curl out of her parted lips—perfume from a flower; you saw her breathing and thought you saw the incense. Her rich black hair hung coiled and loose, and full of mystery; and full of mystery were her deep, dark eyes.

Several couples were flogging each other when the ladies entered. Boundless as was the astonishment of the new-comers, it was fully a minute before Mrs Scamler could

utter a word. At last she said, speaking very quietly for her, but with her usual rapidity and recklessness,—

‘It may be Hell, or it may be Heaven, or it may be Purgatory, but, thank God, we’re not dead, Maud, and they can’t do that to us! Mercy me, though! what a broad back I have if I am dead!’

The comely, middle-aged censors rose, surrounded Mrs Scamler, looked at her intently with their agreeable gravity, placed their fingers on their lips, and retired to their seats. In following the movements of these monitors with their eyes, Mrs Scamler and Maud for the first time since entering the Whipping Room encountered the glances of Earl Lavender and Lord Brumm. Mrs Scamler noticed at once that they had whips in their hands, and drew Maud’s attention to the fact.

‘What does it mean?’ said Maud, under her breath, staying a step in Earl Lavender’s direction she had been about to make, while Mrs Scamler turned pale, clutched her companion’s skirt, and whispered,—

‘I knew there was something wrong with our gentlemen, their conduct was like ghosts.’

The suspense of the ladies was not of long duration. Earl Lavender and Lord Brumm, who had waited only until the floor should be cleared, rose as soon as the last couple of floggers had withdrawn, and stepped up to Mrs Scamler and Maud. Undoing the ‘wicket,’ as the flap of the underground robes was called, they brought down their scourges with vigour on the backs of each, before either quite realised what was toward. Mrs Scamler screamed and spun round like a top, nearly tripping in her clinging skirts; but Lord Brumm caught her neatly a second time on the broad white shoulder-blades. At that Mrs Scamler screamed louder than before, and, dropping on her knees, exclaimed in a terrified voice,—

‘Oh, my sins were very, very little ones; but ask me not to remember them all, for I can’t and never could. I only began irregular verbs, and never came near the nude. Oh my! Did I ever! Poetry again!’

Ask me not to remember them all,
For I can't and never could.
I only began irregular verbs,
And never came near the nude.

Wonderful! Oh, I did charge all the sugar of the house to you—and the bread—and the butter; but if you'll come away up out of this and marry me, you'll get it all back again. My dear—'

Mrs Scamler was allowed to proceed no further in her petition, for the four stately dames of the room bound and gagged her, and Lord Brumm gave her the remaining ten strokes at his ease.

Maud took her flogging sedately. She neither winced, nor clenched her hands, nor set her teeth, nor uttered cry, but stared at Earl Lavender all the time. As for him, the tears were streaming down his cheeks, and a sob burst from him at every stroke; yet he did not curb the force of his arm one jot. When he had counted twelve, he handed the scourge to Maud, and, having adjusted her robe, undid his own. His back was all black and blue from last night's whipping.

Maud shuddered when she saw it, and turned away. But the four stately dames came to her, and one of them, who seemed the eldest, said authoritatively, 'You must lay on and spare not: one good whipping deserves another.' Whereupon Maud, having measured her distance, closed her eyes and brought down the whip with all her might. At the sixth stroke her arm was stayed, and opening her eyes, she beheld with horror dark crimson stains streaking Earl Lavender's bruised back.

'Twelve strokes, or until the blood starts,' said the eldest of the monitors, taking away Maud's whip.

Another of the grave and gracious dames brought from beneath one of the couches a sandal-wood box, out of which she took wherewithal to dress Earl Lavender's wounds.

'You will be whole to-morrow,' she said. 'But you are not allowed the privilege of the scourge again until all traces of whipping have left your back.'

Earl Lavender was about to reply; but the censors of the room once more laid their

fingers on their lips. Complying with the unspoken monition, Earl Lavender bowed low, and, taking Maud's hand, led her with high courtesy into the Dancing Hall.

Lord Brumm had imagined himself strong enough to undergo without flinching a thrashing at the hands of Mrs Scamler as the necessary pain accompanying the great pleasure of scoring that impetuous and overpowering widow's broad and solid shoulders: nothing less than the anticipation of this satisfaction could possibly have tempted him back to the Underworld. When Mrs Scamler began, however, he found that he had made a mistake. The good lady, although not a trained athlete like Maud, was possessed of a powerful arm, whose strength had been well developed by household work. Enraged at the treatment she had received, and at the incomprehensibility of the circumstances in which she found herself, she put such a fury into her blows, that Brumm shrieked at the second, fled at the third, and had to be gagged and tied during the infliction of the

remainder. His flogging extended only to eight strokes. The eighth indeed should not have been delivered, for the blood had sprung at the seventh, but Mrs Scamler was so enthusiastic and expeditious, that she overstepped the limit before the censors could interfere. Yet, as soon as she saw the blood, her whip dropped from her hand, and she fell a-whimpering. But when his wounds were dressed Lord Brumm smiled on her in a superior manner as one already initiated, and, taking her by the hand, led her into the Hall of Fantasy, where he had been entertained on his former visit.

The Hall of Fantasy was lit by exquisite mellow lights pendent from the high, groined roof. Paintings by great masters adorned the walls, and between every picture hung velvet curtains of various hues accordant with the requirements of the canvases. Velvet-covered seats of every shape and degree of accommodation were scattered over the floor, the latter being carpeted with velvet shaded in aesthetic relation to the decoration of the walls. A

number of people—couples and groups—were seated in this apartment talking in ordinary conversational tones when Lord Brumm and Mrs Scamler entered.

‘Ah!’ cried the roguish damsel, who had whipped Lord Brumm the evening before; ‘back already?’

She sat with several companions near the door by which Lord Brumm and Mrs Scamler had come in; and as she spoke she beckoned with her hand. Lord Brumm saluted her, and leading Mrs Scamler in gallant style, joined the company, most of whom he had met on the previous night. He himself found a place beside the roguish damsel, and Mrs Scamler was accommodated between two pleasant-looking young gentlemen.

‘Well, do you know,’ said Mrs Scamler, as soon as she had seated herself comfortably, beaming on everybody through her gold-rimmed pebbles, and touching lightly with her fingers the knee of her right-hand companion—

‘Do you know, I wish my mother had whipped me when I was a girl. You’ve no conception — or, rather, you all must have, to be sure, a regular high-top-liftical conception of the perfect comfort and heavenly ecstasy one experiences after having been whipped. My language simply flows from me, and I find myself using words that I didn’t know I knew. But it does sting! Oh, my! And then, when they gag you and hold you, and you can’t scream or move, and the whip comes down swing—swish—and seems to cut your soul out—it’s like nothing earthly. Lord bless me! I thought I was dead each time, and the blood seething in my veins, and my heart jumping and thumping like the pistol of an engine—though why it should be called a pistol I never did know, for it’s much liker a ramrod. But why do you do it? Where am I?’

‘You are in the Underworld,’ answered the roguish damsel.

‘The Underworld?’ said Mrs Scamler.
‘Is it really Hell, then? Am I dead?’

‘Oh! You do expect to go to Hell when you die?’ said the roguish damsel.

‘Well, my dear,’ rejoined Mrs Scamler in a very candid tone, ‘to tell you the truth, I’m not quite sure whether there are a Heaven and a Hell to go to. That’s the result of education, and a very uncomfortable result it is. In the good old days, when people knew no French — though how the French themselves did is a thing that puzzles me, and always will — there was Heaven, and there was Hell, and you went to one or the other if you were a Protestant, and the Catholics had Purgatory, which I always think a most consoling and good-natured thing, and a thing worth spending money on. You hadn’t the least difficulty about it; you paid the price and took your choice. Poetry! — nearly :—

You paid the price,
And took your ch’ice.

But now one never knows. Only, I think, since you ask me, that if I am dead, which

goodness knows I may be, for I never heard of such a thing before, I'm certainly not in Heaven—there's a picture over there—' (Mrs Scamler nodded her head significantly at a beautiful painting of Venus and Adonis)—'and as I'm a Protestant, of course, it can't be Purgatory, so, my dear people, it seems very likely that it's the other place, and a very pretty and comfortable place it is, no infernal flames and stupid devils at all, but we whip each other when we're in the mood, and we laugh and talk and enjoy ourselves, and I'm very glad I came.'

'The whippings, madam,' said one of the pleasant young gentlemen who sat on either side of Mrs Scamler, 'are not punitive.'

'Punitive?' queried Mrs Scamler. 'Nominative, possessive, abjective, *is* it a case?'

'Yes, it's a case to denote the sufferer of a punishment,' replied the young gentleman. 'Our whippings are not punishments.'

'Aren't they?' said Mrs Scamler.

'No, they are stimulants; and this isn't Hell, at least as far as we know.'

'A prudent reservation,' said the other young gentleman. 'The denizens of Hell, I expect, don't know they're there.'

'Good,' said the other.

'My dear madam,' said the pleasant young gentleman who had endorsed the reservation regarding the tenants of Hell, 'how do we know? Perhaps we are all dead, perhaps we never lived. I know I often take myself to be not even a phantom, but a non-existent item in the dreary nightmare of some swinish creature with secret aspirations after higher things than hog-wash. Do you know Heine and Carlyle?'

'I'm afraid I never heard of the gentlemen—Carlyle?' said Mrs Scamler. 'Yes, I seem to know of him, he was a mahoganist and a wife-beater, wasn't he? Oh, if I'd only had him, I'd have laughed and talked and scoured and scrubbed him into the gentlest of husbands. My dear Mr Gurdon, don't you be frightened, you're a mahoganist but you're a gentle creature too, stout and stolid as you seem, and although you don't know it, just as we don't know whether we

are alive or dead, whether we are in Heaven or Hell.—These are very clever young gentleman, Mr Gurdon.—Well, now, do you know I'm rather sorry I'm not dead. I had made up my mind that it was all over, and I could marry Mr Gurdon in these infernal regions and live happy ever after throughout all eternity, world without end, Amen. But I want to know about these whippings. They do stimulate certainly; I never was so stimulated in all my life. But how did this Underworld begin? What's the meaning of it?'

'Nobody knows how it began,' replied one of the pleasant young gentlemen; 'and it has no meaning.'

'No meaning?'

'No. There are things that can be said about it, of course,' continued the pleasant young gentleman, 'For example, a whipping has a much more exalting effect on the mind than a bottle of champagne, and a much less deleterious effect upon the body. It is a sort of substitute for dissipation. Then novelists, artists, poets,

dramatists and leader-writers come here when they are suffering from depression or brain-fag, and one good whipping is always quite sufficient to restore their mental vigour for a whole year. Best of all, it is the great alternative to, and preventive of, adultery.'

'Now, you don't say so!' cried Mrs Scamler.

'I do, though,' retorted the pleasant young gentleman. 'More than half of the couples who come here for mutual stimulation are lovers, married to unloved spouses, who, if it were not for the vent their feelings obtain in scourging each other, would most infallibly figure in the divorce court.'

'How very interesting!' exclaimed Mrs Scamler.

'What can be the matter now?' said the roguish young damsel before Mrs Scamler could utter a syllable of the countless ideas suggested to her by this singular use of whipping.

The noise which interrupted Mrs Scamler's discourse had attracted the attention

of many others in the Hall of Fantasy, and a considerable number of people surged into the corridor to find out what had happened. One of the pleasant young gentlemen joined the crowd of quidnuncs, and returned hurriedly to announce that a visitor, who had been arrested the night before, had again broken some rule and was being haled to judgment.

‘Earl Lavender!’ cried Lord Brumm.
‘But I’ll not be his sandwichman.’

‘I should think not,’ said Mrs Scamler.
‘Sandwichman, indeed! Whatever do you mean? What he needs is a strait-jacket; that’s the sandwich for him.’

Mrs Scamler, Lord Brumm, the roguish damsel, the two pleasant young gentlemen and their friends crushed with the crowd into the Judgment Hall, where they beheld Earl Lavender arraigned for the second time before the three reverend-looking men who sat at the scroll-covered table. Maud, although not a prisoner, stood close beside him.

‘Judgment, oh, sages!’ cried one of the

young men who had arrested Earl Lavender.

The white-robed sage signed to the accuser to proceed; and he, having made his obeisance, addressed the court.

‘Oh, sages,’ he said, ‘as I sat playing the violin in the Hall of Dancing, this man ascended the steps of the musicians’ gallery, and cried out:—“Meaningless dwellers in this lower world, who whip and dance away the golden hours, I bring you strength and meaning and delight, I bring you fitness, for I am the fittest.”’

‘Blank verse! it is,’ said Mrs Scamler under her breath. ‘That young man’s as wonderful as me. Oh, but it’s not him; he’s only quoting that stupendous creature, Earl Lavender.’

‘Before he could proceed further,’ continued the accuser, ‘I and others seized him and brought him hither.’

‘Has he spoken truly in all points, so far as you know?’ asked the white-robed sage of those who had assisted in bringing Earl Lavender before the judgment-seat.

An inclination of the head expressed the acquiescence of the others in the deposition of the accuser.

The three sages consulted for a minute in whispers, and then the spokesman pronounced doom.

‘This is your second offence,’ he said sternly, ‘and the last you will be allowed to commit in the Underworld. You will be taken hence to a bedroom, and locked in till to-morrow at noon, when you will be stripped to your shirt, and sent up into London never to be re-admitted here.’

As Earl Lavender was led away, his eye searched among the crowd until it lit upon Lord Brumm, whereupon he smiled triumphantly, and uttered in a loud voice the one word,—

‘Remember!’

CHAPTER XIII

HOW THEY ALL ENDED WHERE THEY BEGAN

IMMEDIATELY on the departure of Earl Lavender from the Judgment Hall, Maud fell down in a faint in the middle of the floor. Mrs Scamler hastened to her assistance, and was attended in her good offices by a number of other ladies, among them the famous Damsel of the Veil. As soon as their charge came to herself again, Mrs Scamler declared that they must 'get straight away out of here as fast as their legs could carry them;' but the Lady of the Veil explained that no one might leave the Underworld before the morning, and offered to take care of Maud until bedtime. Mrs Scamler gratefully

assented to this proposal, and she and her friends returned to the Hall of Fantasy, while Maud was re-conducted to the Whipping Room. With the approval of the censors, the Lady of the Veil gave Maud four sound lashes, thereby effectually dispelling the lassitude which had overtaken her; indeed, such an emphatic call on her reserve force made a new woman of her, as the saying is. The two young ladies then whirled slowly across the Hall of Dancing to the ante-room in which Earl Lavender had made his confession, and were soon engaged in a most intimate conversation, reclining on couches opposite and quite close to each other.

‘And how long have you been in the habit of coming here?’ asked Maud.

‘For three years now,’ replied the other. ‘Oh!’ continued the Lady of the Veil, after a pause, sitting up and speaking with great intensity, ‘what would you have me to do? Life is so stale.’

‘Women are having more liberty now:

there are many things they may do that were forbidden to them before,' rejoined Maud.

'Yes, but what things?' was the scornful reply. 'Doctoring, travelling, journalising—antique things that men have been doing for centuries, and can do much better, and always will do much better than women. There is only one thing that women can do better than men—a thing men can't do at all. But I won't do it. I am often tempted to yield to love, and be married and bear children. But what would be the sense? What would be the use? Suppose I were to become the mother of a Caesar, of a Shakespeare, of a Christ. Where would be the advantage? Who wants to serve people who have made in one continent a Popedom, in another an oligarchy of millionaires, out of the Sermon on the Mount? Besides, what does it matter whether people are happy or miserable, bond or free, when the world will be an icicle in a year, or twenty millions of years—duration is of no consequence;

the end's the same, a quenched cinder,
and not a voice to whisper in all space,
"There was once a man."

'But surely this is very morbid?' said Maud.

'Morbid? Of course it is morbid. Is there anything that is not morbid? Life is a disease: the moment we are born we begin to die.'

'Were you ever really in love?'

'Ever really in love? Look at me! I am always in love. If you mean, have I ever deluded myself with the childish notion of love, which finds the universe in an individual, I say, no, a thousand times. I love, I love; but I would sooner give my body to the flames than to marriage. I will not be as the beasts are, a slave of nature. I will not! I will not! And so I come here for days at a time, and starve myself, and am lashed, and conquer desire. And sometimes I burst out in this way to an ingenuous girl like you. But I have done. Now, tell me about yourself and this

strange man who has brought you here.
Do you love him?’

‘Yes,’ answered Maud.

‘And does he love you?’

‘He once did—or said he did. Now he—but let us talk of something else.’

‘Dear, I want to help you,’ said the Lady of the Veil. ‘Now—he is searching for the fittest woman, isn’t he?’

‘How do you know?’

‘Because he mistook me for her last night.’

Maud, unable to restrain her tears, whispered huskily,—

‘I am afraid he is mad.’

‘But tell me about it,’ persisted the Lady of the Veil, taking one of Maud’s hands.

‘Who is he?’

‘He is Sir Harry Emblem of Golden Arbour, in Surrey, and my cousin, and we were married eight days ago, and went to Harwich for Antwerp, and there, almost as soon as we arrived, he left me without a word. I was too ashamed to ask any help, for I knew I was accused of—of courting him, of angling for him, and, I love him so,

that it may have looked like that, and everybody would have jeered; so I wanted to keep it quiet, and went after him alone.'

'And you have spent the first week of the honeymoon in hunting your husband?'

There being no response to that the Lady of the Veil continued after a pause,—

'I don't think your husband is really mad. It is simply a wild humour of vanity, ignorance and ambition.'

Maud was crying quietly, and made no remark. This was the first time she had told anyone of her husband's desertion, and this the first real flood of tears she had shed since her marriage morning.

'I know—I have it!' cried the Lady of the Veil, starting up suddenly. 'Wait here till I come back.'

She returned in about ten minutes, and told Maud that she had been to the highest known authority in the Underworld, a nameless old man of a most powerful personality, and that she had persuaded him to visit Earl Lavender and reason with him.

'He has reasoned often with me,' she

added, 'and advises me to marry, but I am not persuaded. Your husband, however, is already married, and I think he may be able to do something with him. Come with me and we shall wait at the door. This is a breaking of all rules for ladies to enter the gentlemen's apartments; but the Nameless One takes the responsibility: he can make and unmake laws as he wishes, and ordered us to do this.'

Having reached the men's division, they stood close to the door of the room in which Earl Lavender had been shut up, and Maud for a second or two listened at the keyhole, but only the murmur of speech was audible.

The conversation between Earl Lavender and the Nameless One, although conducted in a very quiet tone, was none the less important on that account. Much impressed by the great age, lofty stature, and majestic proportions of his unexpected visitor, Earl Lavender was at first inclined to be reticent, but the Nameless One soon set him at his ease, and led him on into an eloquent statement of his great mission, which ended thus,—

'The day for half measures is over. There must be no more grafting of new ideas on worn-out stems. We must grub up the decaying trunks. All the old creeds must be torn out though the heart of the world come with them. All art, all literature must begin over again. Religion must cease absolutely, and be for ever forgotten. Mark you, I do not mean only Christianity or religiosity, but I mean religion in the broadest sense in which the most advanced thinker may cling to it. For religion we must substitute Evolution. I perceive you to be a man of authority in these nether regions. Be converted; become an Evolutionist, and aid me in the conversion of all who visit these abodes. Let us arm ourselves. Let us sally forth in the middle of the night, and crying, "The fittest shall survive, and Earl Lavender is the fittest," seize London in the name of Evolution.'

'You are a caricature,' said the Nameless One in a deep voice.

'What?' cried Earl Lavender.

'You are a caricature.'

‘I fail to understand you.’

‘I say you are, at present, a caricature. You must go marry; know the world; and endeavour to live a decent, honest life. You are only an exaggerated type in these latter days of individualism—fantastic creatures, made what they are by pseudo-philosophy, feeble poetry, and foolish fiction. Go; be human; and give nature a chance.’

Earl Lavender was utterly confounded, as many a greater man has been by quiet ridicule, and the dreadful common-sense point of view.

‘But,’ he gasped at last, ‘Evolution is the word of the age.’

‘If you like,’ rejoined the Nameless One; ‘but it was not the word of the past age, and it won’t be the word of the next age. There is a famous nursery rhyme which I am persuaded was made about ages and men and words—

I had a little husband,
No bigger than my thumb;
I put him in a pint-pot,
And there I made him drum.

The ages love jokes, and they take hold of men frequently, and put them inside a word to beat their brains out against it.'

'Idle mockery,' said Earl Lavender, regaining confidence. 'There can be no doubt of the truth of Evolution; to-day I discovered the missing link.'

'Everything is true as long as it is believed. Men make truth: were there no men there would be neither truth nor untruth. You discovered the missing link? Well, and good. But what missing link? The link through which men have degenerated into monkeys, or the link through which monkeys have developed into men? But we never talk or think of monkeys in the Underworld. Ugly, loathsome brutes, their horrible caricature of humanity has degraded man in his own eyes, and helped him to a ridiculous theory of the universe. Instead of regarding man as the descendant of an ape, one is sometimes much more strongly inclined to look upon the whole quadrumanous tribe as the mongrel offspring of some prehistoric human race.

I would have all the monkeys destroyed, and erase their image from the memory of man.'

'But that would be a sin against science. Surely you know well that nothing unnecessary ever existed, or can exist.'

'I know nothing of the sort,' replied the Nameless One. 'Many races of animals are now extinct, destroyed in convulsions of nature, or in the struggle for existence. Was *their* destruction a sin against science? Why should not mankind in an æsthetic rage—which would really be a convulsion of nature—obliterate this ugly libel upon itself?'

'You talk irrationally,' retorted Earl Lavender. 'Science cannot yet dispense with monkeys. The theory of Evolution—'

'Damn the theory of Evolution,' said the Nameless One in his deep, passionless voice. 'It is time it were played out, like the hundred theories that have preceded it. Had there been no monkeys this theory would have been a very subordinate theory indeed; it could never have

made much headway against *two* missing links.'

'But what are we to do?' asked Earl Lavender blankly.

'Await in patience the great man of science who shall arise and instal, as Moses did, a theory of the universe ignoring entirely all known facts.'

'Why, I can do that,' said Earl Lavender eagerly. 'I am as ignorant as can be.'

'So I perceive. But in order to do without facts now-a-days, you must know them all. No merely ignorant theory could possibly improve on the Mosaic one.'

'Then I shall study,' said Earl Lavender, greatly excited. 'But, tell me, what is the symbolic meaning of the "Razor and Hen?"'

'It is the symbol,' answered the Nameless One promptly, 'of the foolishness of a barber, who married the daughter of the innkeeper of the "Hen and Chickens," and changed the sign when the old man died.'

'How did you divine that the "Razor and Hen" was a tavern sign?' asked Earl Lavender breathless with wonder.

'I did not divine it,' replied the Nameless One. 'I knew the inn—it is in Epping Forest, and I remember when the sign was changed. Perfect divination is possible only to perfect knowledge: hence the inadequacy of all messages.'

'Then to make my message adequate I must acquire knowledge?'

'Most indubitably.'

'And how shall I set about it?'

'You must marry and have children, read as your tastes direct you, and take a share in the world's work.'

'But that is exactly what Tom, Dick and Harry do.'

'Exactly.'

Without another word the Nameless One left the room, and thrust Maud into it. Then, when he had locked the door on the outside, he said to the Lady of the Veil,—

'He was quite unable to distinguish between what I said sophistically, and what I

said sensibly ; but he is a fine young fellow, this Sir Harry Emblem, and not nearly so mad as you are, my dear. He has a greedy, powerful intellect which has been starved, and so lost its temper.'

'I am the only sane person of my acquaintance,' said the Lady of the Veil.

The Nameless One smiled, and the two waited in silence at Earl Lavender's door.

'It is time,' said the Nameless One when ten minutes had elapsed.

He then re-entered the room, accompanied by the Lady of the Veil, to find Earl Lavender and Maud, or rather Sir Harry and Lady Emblem, sitting on the edge of the bed in a close embrace, with tears in their eyes and blushes on their cheeks.

'High time, indeed!' said the old man. 'There is only one law which I may not set aside : there must be no honeymooning in the Underworld. But I shall send you away at once with your companions.'

The Nameless One then kissed Lady Emblem, shook hands with Sir Harry, and, taking a ring from his finger, gave it to the Lady of the Veil.

‘This,’ he said, ‘will open all doors. Return it to me when you have seen them forth.’

In the Hall of Fantasy, to which the Lady of the Veil led the reconciled couple, the reappearance of Sir Harry Emblem so shortly after his imprisonment created a profound sensation; but no questions were asked, nor comments made, for the ring of the Nameless One was known to all.

‘Oh, your lordship, or mister,’ began Mrs Scamler.

‘Silence,’ said the Lady of the Veil, ‘and follow us.’

Sir Harry Emblem and the quondam Lord Brumm retired to the men’s toilet-room. Having quickly dressed themselves in their own clothes, they found their way to the staircase by which they had descended into the Underworld, and were

there joined by Lady Emblem and Mrs Scamler. Sir Harry looked about for the Lady of the Veil, but she was not to be seen.

‘She sent you this,’ said Lady Emblem, kissing her husband.

In another minute the errant couples stood in Rookwood Square, within sound of Piccadilly, scarcely knowing whether they were asleep or awake. It was Mr Gurdon who spoke first.

‘I vote,’ he said, ‘that we take a growler straight away, and dine together in the “Cap-and-Bells.”’

‘It is not a brilliant remark,’ said Sir Harry, ‘but it is very sensible.’

‘Now,’ said Mrs Scamler, as she stepped into the four-wheeler, ‘I never did understand why people’s brains were the only brilliant thing about them. Their bodies may be brilliant, too.’

‘Admirable!’ said Sir Harry. ‘Men should have credit for brilliant appetites, capacious stomachs, and active livers.’

‘And the march from St Paul’s to West-

minster?' said Mr Gurdon, as they drove away.

Sir Harry pressed his wife's hand and made no reply.

THE END

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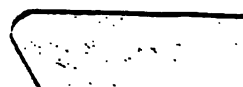
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